AN

ESSAY

ON THE

WRITINGS AND GENIUS

OF

SHAKESPEAR.

AN ESSAY ON THE WRITINGS AND GENIUS OF SHAKESPEAR,

COMPARED WITH THE GREEK AND FRENCH DRAMATIC POETS.

WITH SOME REMARKS

Upon the MISREPRESENTATIONS of

Monſ. de VOLTAIRE.

Mrs Montague

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INTRODUCTION.

MR. Pope, in the preface of his edition of Shakeſpear, ſets out by declaring, that of all Engliſh poets, this tragedian offers the fulleſt and fairеſt ſubject for criticiſm. Animated by an opinion of ſuch authority, ſome of the moſt learned and ingenious of our critics have made correct editions of his works, and enriched them with notes. The ſuperiority of talents and learning, which I acknowledge in theſe editors leaves me no room to entertain the vain preſumption of attempting to correct any paſſages of this celebrated author; but the whole, as corrected and elucidated by them, lies open to a thorough enquiry into the genius of our great Engliſh claſſic. Unprejudiced and candid judgment will be the ſureſt baſis of his fame. He is now in danger of incurring the fate of the heroes of the fabulous ages, on whom the vanity of their country, and the ſuperſtition of the times, beſtowed an apotheoſis founded on pretenſions to achievements beyond human capacity, by which they loſt

in a more ſceptical and critical age, the glory that was due to them for what they had really done; and all the veneration they had obtained, was aſcribed to ignorant credulity, and national prepoſſeſſion.—Our Shakeſpear, whoſe very faults paſs here unqueſtioned, or are perhaps conſecrated through the enthuſiaſm of his admirers, and the veneration paid to long-eſtabliſhed fame, is by a great wit, a great critic, and a great poet of a neighbouring nation, treated as the writer of monſtrous farces, called by him tragedies; and barbariſm and ignorance are attributed to the nation by which he is admired. Yet if wits, poets, critics, could ever be charged with preſumption, one might ſay there was ſome degree of it in pronouncing, that in a country where Sophocles and Euripides are as well underſtood as in any in Europe, the perfections of dramatic poetry ſhould be as little comprehended as among the Chineſe.

Learning here is not confined to eccleſiaſtics, or a few lettered ſages and academics; every Engliſh gentleman has an education, which gives him an early acquaintance with the writings of the ancients. His knoweledge of polite literature dos not begin

begin with the period which Mr. de Voltaire calls Le Siecle de Louis quatorze. Before he is admitted as a ſpectator at the theatre at London, it is probable he has heard the tragic muſe as ſhe ſpoke at Athens, and as ſhe now ſpeaks at Paris, or in Italy; and he can diſcern between the natural language in which ſhe addreſſed the human heart, and the artificial dialect which ſhe has acquired from the prejudices of a particular nation, or the jargon caught from the tone of a court. To pleaſe upon the French ſtage, every perſon of every age and nation was made to adopt their manners.

The heroes of antiquity were not more diſguiſed in the romances of Calprenade and Scuderi than in the tragedies of Corneille. In ſpite of the admonition given by that admirable critic Boileau to their dramatic writers in the following lines:

Gardez donc de donner, ainſi que dans Clélie,
L'air ni l'eſprit François à l'antique Italie;
Et ſous des noms Romains faiſſant notre portrait,
Peindre Caton galant, & Brutus damoret.

The Horatii are repreſented no leſs obſequious in their addreſs to their king than the courtiers of the grand monarque. The-

ſeus is made a mere ſighing ſwain. Many of the greateſt men of antiquity, and even the roughest heroes among the Goths and Vandals, were exhibited in this effeminate form. The poet dignified the piece, perhaps with the name of an Hercules, but, alas! it was always Hercules ſpinning that was ſhewn to the ſpectator. The editor of Corneille's works, in terms ſo groſs as are hardly pardonable in ſuch a maſter of fine raillery, frequently attacks our Shakeſpear for the want of politeneſs in his pieces: it muſt be owned, that in ſome places they bear the marks of the unpoliſhed times in which he wrote, but one cannot forbear ſmiling to hear a critic, who profeſſes himſelf an admirer of the tragedies of Corneille, object to the barbariſm of Shakeſpear's. There never was a more barbarous mode of writing than that of the French Romances in the laſt age, nor which from its tedioufneſs, languor, and want of truth of character is leſs fit to be copied on the ſtage: and what are moſt of the parts of Corneille's boaſted tragedies, but the romantic dialogue, its tedious ſoliloquy, and its extravagant ſentiments in the true Gothic livery of rhyme?

The

The French poets aſſume a ſuperiority over Shakeſpear, on account of their more conſtant adherence to Ariſtotle's unities of time and place.

The pedant who bought at a great price the lamp of a famous philoſopher, expecting that by its aſſiſtance his lucubrations would become equally celebrated, was little more abſurd than thoſe poets who ſuppoſe their dramas will be excellent if they are regulated by Ariſtotle's clock. To bring within a limited time and an aſſigned ſpace certain ſeries of converſations (and French plays are little more) is no difficult matter; for that is the eaſieſt part of every art perhaps, but in poetry without diſpute, in which the connoiſſeur can direct the artiſt.

I do not believe the critic imagined that a mere obedience to his laws of drama would make a good tragedy, tho' it might prevent a poet more bold and judicious, from writing a very abſurd one. A painter can define the juſt proportion of the human body, and the anatomiſt knows what muſcles conſtitute the ſtrength of the limbs; but grace of motion and exertion of ſtrength, depend on the mind, which

animates the form. The critic but faſhions the body of a work; the poet muſt add the ſoul, which gives force and direction to its actions, and geſtures: when one of theſe critics has attempted to finiſh a work by his own rules, he has rarely been able to convey into it one ſpark of divine fire; and the hero of his piece, whom he deſigned for a man, remains a cold inanimate ſtatue; which moving on the wood and wire of the great maſters in the mechanical part of the drama, preſents to the ſpectators a kind of heroic puppet-ſhew. As theſe pieces take their riſe in the ſchool of criticiſm, they return thither again, and are as good ſubjects for the ſtudents in that art, as a dead body to the profeſſors in phyſic. Moſt minutely too have they been anatomiſed in learned academies: but works animated by genius will not abide this kind of diſſection.

Mr. Pope ſays, that to form a judgment of Shakeſpear's works, we are not to apply to the rules of Ariſtotle, which would be like trying a man by the laws of one country, who lived under thoſe of another.—Heaven-born genius acts from ſomething ſuperior to rules, and antecedent to rules; and has a right to appeal to nature herſelf.

Great

Great indulgence is due to the errors of original writers, who quitting the beaten track which others have travelled, make daring incurſions into unexplored regions of invention, and boldly ſtrike into the pathleſs ſublime: it is no wonder if they are often bwildered, ſometimes benighted; yet ſurely it is more eligible to partake the pleaſure and the toil of their adventures, than ſtill to follow the cautious ſteps of timid imitators through trite and common roads. Genius is of a bold enterprizing nature, ill adapted to the formal reſtraints of critic inſtitutions, or indeed to lay down to itſelf rules of nice diſcretion. If perfect and faultleſs compoſition is ever to be expected from human faculties, it muſt be at ſome happy period when a noble and graceful ſimplicity, the reſult of well regulated and ſober magnanimity, reigns through the general manners. Then the muſes and the arts, neither effeminately delicate nor audaciouſly bold, aſſume their higheſt character, and in all their compoſitions ſeem to reſpect the chaſtity of the public taſte, which would equally diſdain quaintneſs of ornament, or the rude neglect of elegance and decorum. Such periods had Greece, had Rome! Then were produced immortal works of every

kind! But, when the living manners degenerated, in vain did an Ariſtotle and a Quintilian endeavour to reſtore by doctrine what had been inſpired by ſentiments, and faſhioned by manners.

If the ſeverer muſes, whoſe ſphere is the library and the ſenate, are obliged in complaiſance to this degeneracy, to trick themſelves out with meretricious and frivolous ornaments, as is too apparent from the compoſitions of the hiſtorians and orators in declining empires, can we wonder that a dramatic poet, whoſe chief intereſt it is to pleaſe the people, ſhould, more than any other writer, conform himſelf to their humour; and appear moſt ſtrongly infected with the faults of the times, whether they be ſuch as belong to unpoliſhed, or corrupted taſte.

Shakeſpear wrote at a time when learning was tinctured with pedantry: wit was unpoliſhed, and mirth ill-bred. The court of Elizabeth ſpoke a ſcientific jargon, and a certain obſcurity of ſtyle was univerſally affected. James brought an addition of pedantry, accompanied by indecent and indelicate manners and language. By contagion, or from complaiſance to the taſte of the

the public, Shakeſpear falls ſometimes into the faſhionable mode of writing: but this is only by fits; for many parts of all his plays are written with the moſt noble, elegant, and uncorrupted ſimplicity. Such is his merit, that the more juſt and refined the taſte of the nation has become, the more he has encreaſed in reputation. He was approved by his own age, admired by the next, and is revered and almoſt adored by the preſent. His merit is diſputed by little wits, and his errors are the jeſts of little critics; but there has not been a great poet, or great critic, ſince his time, who has not ſpoken of him with the higheſt veneration, Mr. Voltaire excepted. His tranſlations often, his criticiſms ſtill oftener, prove he did not perfectly underſtand the words of the author; and therefore it is certain he could not enter into his meaning. He comprehended enough to perceive he was unobſervant of ſome eſtabliſhed rules of compoſition; the facility with which he performs what no rules can teach eſcapes him. Will not an intelligent ſpectator admire the prodigious ſtructures of Stone-Henge, becauſe he does not know by what law of mechanics they were raiſed? Like them, our author's works will remain for ever the greateſt monuments of the amaz-

ing force of nature, which we ought to view as we do other prodigies, with an attention to, and admiration of their ſtupendous parts, and proud irregularity of greatneſs.

It has been already declared that Shakeſpear is not to be tried by any code of critic laws; nor is it more equitable to judge him entirely by the practice of any particular theatre. Yet ſome criterion muſt be eſtabliſhed by which we may determine his merits. Firſt, we muſt take into conſideration what is propoſed to be done by the means of dramatic imitation. Every ſpecies of poetry has its diſtinct offices. The effecting certain moral purpoſes, by the repreſentation of a fable, ſeem to have been the univerſal intention, from the firſt inſtitution of the drama to this time; and to have prevailed, not only in Europe, but in all countries where the dramatic art has been attempted. It has indeed been the common aim of all poetry to pleaſe and inſtruct; but by means as various as the kinds of compoſition. We are pleaſed with the ode, the elegy, the eclogue; not only for having invention, ſpirit, elegance, and ſuch perfections as are neceſſary to recommend any ſort of poetry, but we alſo require

quire that each ſhould have its ſpecific merit; the ode, that which conſtitutes the perfection of an ode, &c. In theſe views, then, our author is to be examined. Firſt, if his fables anſwer the nobleſt end of fable, moral inſtruction; next, whether his dramatic imitation has its proper dramatic excellence. In the latter of theſe articles, perhaps, there is not any thing will more aſſiſt our judgment than a candid compariſon (where the nature of the ſubject will bear it) between his and ſome other celebrated dramatic compoſitions. It is idle to refer to a vague, unrealized idea of perfection: we may ſafely pronounce that to be well executed, in any art, which after the repeated efforts of great geniuſes is equal to any thing that has been produced. We may ſecurely applaud what the ancients have crowned; therefore ſhould not withold our approbation wherever we find our countryman has equalled the moſt admired paſſages in the Greek tragedians: but we ſhall not do juſtice to his native talents, when they are the object of conſideration, if we do not remember the different circumſtances under which theſe writings were compoſed. Shakeſpear's plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, juſt emerging from barbarity:

rity: the Greek tragedies were to be exhibited at the public charge, under the care and auſpices of the magiſtrates at Athens; where the very populace were critics in wit, and connoiſſeurs in public ſpectacles. The period when Sophocles and Euripides wrote, was that in which the fine arts, and polite literature, were in a degree of perfection which ſucceeding ages have emulated in vain.

It happened in the literary as in the moral world; a few ſages, from the veneration which they had obtained by extraordinary wiſdom and a faultleſs conduct, roſe to the authority of legiſlators. The practice and manner of the three celebrated Greek tragedians were by ſucceeding critics eſtabliſhed as dramatic laws: happily for Shakeſpear, Mr. Johnſon, whoſe genius and learning render him ſuperior to a ſervile awe of pedantic inſtitutions, in his ingenious preface to his edition of Shakeſpear has greatly obviated all that can be objected to our author's neglect of the unities of time andplace.

Shakeſpear's felicity has been rendered compleat in his age. His genius produced works that time could not deſtroy but ſome

ſome of the lighter characters were become illegible; theſe have been reſtored by critics whoſe learning and penetration traced back the veſtiges of ſuperannuated opinions and cuſtoms. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced, and the teſtimonies of theſe learned commentators to his merit, will guard our author's great monument of human wit from the preſumptuous invaſions of our raſh critics, and the ſquibs of our witlings; ſo that the bays will flouriſh unwithered and inviolate round his tomb; and his very ſpirit ſeems to come forth and to animate his characters, as often as Mr. Garrick, who acts with the ſame inſpiration with which he wrote, aſſumes them on the ſtage.

After our poet had received ſuch important ſervices from the united efforts of talents and learning in his behalf, ſome apology ſeems neceſſary for this work. Let it be remembered that the moſt ſuperb and laſting monument that ever was conſecrated to beauty, was that to which every lover carried a tribute. I dare hope to do him honour only by augmenting the heap of volumes given by his admirers to his memory; I will own I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of his genius

nius, and ſtill greater indignation at the treatment he had received from a French wit, who ſeems to think he has made prodigious conceſſions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our countryman in allowing them the credit of a few ſplendid paſſages, while he ſpeaks of every entire piece as a monſtrous and ill-conſtructed farce.—Ridiculouſly has our poet, and ridiculouſly has our taſte been repreſented, by a writer of univerſal fame; and through the medium of an almoſt univerſal language. Superficial criticiſms hit the level of ſhallow minds, to whom a bon mot will ever appear reaſon, and an epigrammatic turn argument; ſo that many of our countrymen have haſtily adopted this lively writer's opinion of the extravagance and total want of deſign in Shakeſpear's dramas. With the more learned, deep, and ſober critics he lies under one conſiderable diſadvantage. For copying nature as he found it in the buſy walks of human life, he drew from an original, with which the literati are ſeldom well acquainted. They perceive his portraits are not of the Grecian or of the Roman ſchool: after finding them unlike to the celebrated forms preſerved in learned muſeums they do not deign to enquire whether they reſemble the living perſons they

they were intended to repreſent. Among theſe connoiſſeurs, whoſe acquaintance with the characters of men is formed in the library, not in the ſtreet, the camp, or village, whatever is unpoliſhed and uncouth paſſes for fantaſtic and abſurd, though, in fact, it is a faithful repreſentation of a really exiſting character.

But it muſt be acknowledged, that, when this objection is obviated there will yet remain another cauſe of cenſure; for though our author, from want of delicacy or from a deſire to pleaſe the popular taſte, thought he had done well when he had faithfully copied nature, or repreſented cuſtoms, it will appear to politer times the error of an untutored mind; which the example of judicious artiſts, and the admonitions of delicate connoiſſeurs had not taught, that only graceful nature and decent cuſtoms give proper ſubjects for imitation. It may be ſaid in mitigation of his fault that the vulgar here had not, as at Athens, been uſed to behold,

> Gorgeous tragedy
> In ſcepter'd pall come ſweeping by,
> Preſenting Thebes or Pelops' line,
> Or the tale of Troy divine.

Homer's

Homer's works alone were ſufficient to teach the Greek poets how to write, and their audience how to judge. The ſongs ſung by our bards at feaſts and merry-makings were of a very coarſe kind: As the people were totally illiterate, and only the better ſort could read even their mother tongue, their taſte was formed on theſe compoſitions. As yet our ſtage had exhibited only thoſe palpable allegories by which rude unlettered moraliſts inſtruct and pleaſe the groſs and ignorant multitude. Nothing can more plainly evince the opinion the poets of thoſe times had of the ignorance of the people, than the condeſcenſion ſhewn to it by the learned Earl of Dorſet in his tragedy of Gorboduc; in which the moral of each act is repreſented on the ſtage in dumb ſhew. It is ſtrange that Mr. de Voltaire who affects an impartial and philoſophic ſpirit, ſhould not rather ſpeak with admiration than contempt of an author, who by the force of genius roſe ſo much above the age and circumſtances in which he was born, and who, even when he deviates moſt from rules, *can riſe to faults true critics dare not mend.* In delineating characters he muſt be allowed far to ſurpaſs all dramatic writers, and even Homer himſelf; he gives an air of reality to

to every thing, and in ſpite of many and great faults, effects, better than any one has done, the chief purpoſes of the theatrical repreſentation. It avails little to prove that the means by which he effects them are not thoſe preſcribed in any art of poetry. While we feel the power and energy of his predominant genius, ſhall we not be apt to treat the cold formal precepts of the critic, with the ſame peeviſh contempt that the good lady in the Guardian, ſmarting in the anguiſh of a burn, does her ſon's pedantic intruſion of Mr. Lock's doctrine, to prove that there is no heat in fire. Nature and ſentiment will pronounce our Shakeſpear to be a mighty genius; judgment and taſte will confeſs that as a writer he is far from being faultleſs.

ON

DRAMATIC POETRY.

ON

DRAMATIC POETRY.

TO form a true judgment of the merit of any dramatic compoſition, we ſhould firſt conſider the offices and ends of the drama; what are its pretenſions, and for what purpoſes it aſſumes a manner ſo different from any other kind of poetical imitation. The epic poem and the tragedy, ſays Ariſtotle, are purely imitations *; but the dramatic is an imitation of the actions of men, by the means of action itſelf. The epic is alſo an imitation of the actions of men, but it imitates by narration. The moſt perfect, and the beſt imitation, is certainly that which gives the moſt adequate, lively, and faithful copy of the thing imitated. Homer was ſo ſenſible of the ſuperior force and efficacy of the dramatic manner, that he often drops the narrative to aſſume it; and Ariſtotle ſays, that for having invented the dramatic imitation, and not

* Ariſt. Poet. C. 1. Chap. 3.

not only on account of his other excellencies, He alone deſerves the name of poet *.

It is apparent, therefore, how far this great critic prefers this, to every other ſpecies of imitation.

The general object of poetry, among the ancients, was the inſtruction of mankind, in religion, morals, philoſophy, *&c.* To theſe great purpoſes were tuned the harps of Orpheus, Muſæus, Heſiod, Callimachus, *&c.* Nor in Greece alone was poetry the teacher, and the guardian of the ſanctities of human ſociety. † Our Northern bards aſſumed the ſame holy offices; the ſame ſacred character. They directed the modes of divine worſhip: they taught the moral duties; inſpired and celebrated heroic deeds; ſung the praiſes of valour, and the charms of liberty; and ſnatched from oblivion the bold achievements, and meritorious acts, of patriots, and of heroes. In the Eaſt, the poet veiled his inventions in myſterious allegories and divine mythology; and rather endeavoured to raiſe the mind to heavenly contemplations, than to inſtruct it in human affairs.

* Chap. 4. † Hiſtoire des Celtes, l. 2. c. 9.

In

In Greece, the general mother of arts, aroſe the mighty genius of Homer; of whom it may be ſaid, as it is of Socrates with relation to philoſophy, that he brought poetry from heaven, to live in cities among men. The moral of the fable of the Iliad is adapted to the political ſtate of Greece, whoſe various chiefs are hereby exhorted to unanimity; the Odyſſey, to the general condition of human nature; but the epiſodical part of his works he has enriched with mythology, phyſical allegory, the fine arts, and whatever adorned the mind of man, or bleſt ſociety; even rules of domeſtic œconomy, ſocial behaviour, and all the ſweet civilities of life, are taught by this great maſter, of what may be called, in the moſt enlarged ſenſe, the humanities. Yet firſt in the rank of all the eminent perfections of this unequaled bard, is placed the invention of the dramatic imitation, by a critic, whoſe judgment was formed by philoſophy, and a deep knowledge of human nature. He ſaw the powerful agency of living words, joined to moving things, when ſtill narration yields the place to animated action.

It is as a moral philoſopher, not as the mere connoiſſeur in a polite art, that Ariſtotle

totle gives the preference, above all other modes of poetic imitation, to tragedy, as capable to purge the paſſions, by the means of pity and terror *. The object of the epic poem is to inſpire magnanimity; to give good documents of life; to induce good habits ‡, and, as a wholeſome regimen, to preſerve the whole moral œconomy in a certain ſoundneſs and integrity. But it is not compoſed of ingredients of ſuch efficacy as to ſubdue the violent diſtempers of the mind, nor can apply its art to the benefit of the ignorant vulgar, where thoſe diſtempers are in their moſt exaſperated ſtate. An epic poem is too abſtruſe for the people; the moral is too much enveloped, the language too elevated for their apprehenſion; nor have they leiſure, or application, to trace the conſequences of ill-governed paſſions, or erroneous principles, through the long ſeries of a voluminous work. The drama is happily conſtituted for this purpoſe. Events are brought within the compaſs of a ſhort period: precepts are delivered in the familiar way of diſcourſe: the fiction is concealed, the allegory is realized: and repreſentation and action take the place of

*Chap. 6. ‡ Du Poeme Epique par Boſſu, l. 2. c. 17.

cold

cold unaffecting narration. A tragedy is a fable exhibited to the view, and rendered palpable to the ſenſes; and every decoration of the ſtage is contrived to impoſe the deluſion on the ſpectator, by conſpiring with the imitation. It is addreſſed to the imagination, through which it opens to itſelf a communication to the heart, where it is to excite certain paſſions and affections: each character being perſonated, and each event exhibited, the attention of the audience is greatly captivated, and the imagination ſo far aids in the deluſion, as to ſympathize with the repreſentation. To the muſe of tragedy, therefore, Mr. Pope has aſſigned the noble taſk,

To wake the ſoul by tender ſtrokes of art,
To raiſe the genius, and to mend the heart.
To make mankind in conſcious virtue bold,
Live o'er each ſcene, and be what they behold.

He aſcribes ſuch power to a well-wrought ſcene, as to aſk,

When Cato groans who does not wiſh to bleed?

He would not have ſuppoſed the death of Hector, or Sarpedon, to have had an equal effect on any reader of the Iliad; ſuch enthuſiaſm is to be caught only from the ſtage, and is the effect alone of ſtrong-working ſympathy, and paſſions agitated

by the peculiar force and activity of the dramatic manner. Writers of feeble genius, in their compoſitions for the ſtage, frequently deviate into the narrative and deſcriptive ſtyle; a fault for which nothing can atone; for the drama is a ſpecies of poetry, as diſtinct from the epic, as ſtatuary from painting; and can no more receive that merit which ſpecifically belongs to it, and conſtitutes its perfection, from fine verſification, or any other poetical ornaments, than a ſtatue can be rendered a fine ſpecimen of ſculpture, from being beautifully coloured, or highly poliſhed. It is frivolous and idle therefore to inſiſt on any little incidental and acceſſory beauties, where the main part, the very conſtitution of the thing is defective. Yet on ſome trivial beauties do the French found all their pretenſions to ſuperiority and excellence in the drama.

According to Ariſtotle there can be no tragedy without action *. Mr. Voltaire confeſſes that ſome of the moſt admired tragedies in France, are rather converſations, than repreſentations of an action. It will hardly be allowed to thoſe who fail

* Ariſt. chap. vi.

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in the moſt eſſential part of an art, to ſet up their performances as models. Can they who have robbed the tragic muſe of all her virtue, and diveſted her of whatſoever gave her a real intereſt in the human heart, require we ſhould adore her for the glitter of a few falſe brilliants, or the nice arangement of frippery ornaments? If ſhe wears any thing of intrinſic value it has been borrowed from the ancients; but by theſe artiſts it is ſo fantaſtically faſhioned to modern modes, as to loſe all its original graces, and even that neceſſary qualification of all ornament, fitneſs and propriety. A French tragedy is a tiſſue of declamations, and ſome laboured recitals of the cataſtrophe, by which the ſpirit of the drama is greatly weakened and enervated, and the theatrical piece is deprived of that peculiar influence over the mind, which it derives from the vivid force of repreſentation.

Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aurem,
Quam quæ ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipe ſibi tradit ſpectator.

The buſineſs of the drama is to excite ſympathy; and its effect on the ſpectator depends on ſuch a juſtneſs of imitation, as

ſhall cauſe, to a certain degree, the ſame paſſions and affections, as if what is exhibited was real. We have obſerved narrative imitation to be too faint and feeble a means to excite paſſion: declamation, ſtill worſe, plays idly on the ſurface of the ſubject, and makes the poet, who ſhould be concealed in the action, viſible to the ſpectator. In many works of art, our pleaſure ariſes from a reflection on the art itſelf; and in a compariſon, drawn by the mind, between the original and the copy before us. But here the art and the artiſt muſt not appear; for as often as we recur to to the poet, ſo often our ſympathy with the action on the ſtage is ſuſpended. The pompous declamations of the French theatre are mere rhetorical flouriſhes, ſuch as an unintereſted perſon might make on the ſtate of the perſons in the drama. They aſſume the office of the ſpectator by expreſſing his feelings, inſtead of conveying to us the ſtrong emotions and ſenſations of the perſons under the preſſure of diſtreſs. Experience informs us, that even the inarticulate groans, and involuntary convulſions, of a creature in agonies, affect us much more than the moſt eloquent and elaborate deſcription of its ſituation, delivered in the propereſt words, and moſt ſignificant

ſignificant geſtures. Our pity is attendant on the paſſion of the unhappy perſon and on his own ſenſe of his misfortunes. From deſcription, from the report of a ſpectator, we may make ſome conjecture of his internal ſtate of mind, and ſo far we ſhall be moved: but the direct and immediate way to the heart, is by the ſufferer's expreſſion of his paſſion. As there may be ſome obſcurity in what I have ſaid on this ſubject, I will endeavour to illuſtrate the doctrine by examples.

Sophocles, in his admirable tragedy of Œdipus Coloneus, makes Œdipus expoſtulate with his undutiful ſon. The injured parent expoſes the enormity of filial diſobedience; ſets forth the duties of this relation in a very ſtrong and lively manner; but it is only by the vehemence with which he ſpeaks of them, and the imprecations he utters againſt the delinquent ſon, that we can gueſs at the violence of the emotions; therefore he excites more indignation at the conduct of Polynices, than ſympathy with his own ſorrow; of what we can judge only as ſpectators; for he has explained to us merely the external duties and relations of parent and child. The pangs of paternal tenderneſs, thus wound-

ed, is more pathetically expreſſed by King Lear, who leaves out whatever of this enormity is equally ſenſible to the ſpectator, and immediately expoſes to us his own internal feelings, when, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, curſing his daughters offspring, he adds,

> That ſhe may feel,
> How ſharper than a ſerpent's tooth it is,
> To have a thankleſs child.

By this we perceive how deeply paternal affection is wounded by filial ingratitude.

In the play of King John, the legate offers many arguments of conſolation to Conſtance, on the loſs of Arthur: they appear, to the ſpectator, reaſonable, till ſhe ſo ſtrongly expreſſes the peculiar tenterneſs of maternal love, by anſwering,

> He ſpeaks to me that never had a ſon.

One might be made to conceive, in ſome degree, the horrors of a murderer, under whoſe knife the bleeding victim is expiring in agonies, by a deſcription of the unhappy object; but how fully, and how forcibly, is the conſciouſneſs of guilt expreſſed by Macbeth, when, ſpeaking of the grooms who lay near Duncan, he ſays!

MACBETH.

MACBETH.

One cry'd, God bleſs us! and Amen! the other;
As they had ſeen me with theſe hangman's hands,
Liſtening their fear. I could not ſay, Amen,
When they did ſay, God bleſs us!

Theſe expreſſions open to us the internal ſtate of the perſons intereſted, and never fail to command our ſympathy. Shakeſpear ſeems to have had the art of the Derviſe, in the Arabian tales, who could throw his ſoul into the body of another man, and be at once poſſeſſed of his ſentiments, adopt his paſſions, and riſe to all the functions and feelings of his ſituation.

Shakeſpear was born in a rank of life, in which men indulge themſelves in a free expreſſion of their paſſions, with little regard to exterior appearance. This perhaps made him more acquainted with the movements of the heart, and leſs knowing or obſervant of outward forms: againſt the one he often offends, he very rarely miſrepreſents the other. The French tragedians, on the contrary, attend not to the nature of the man whom they repreſent, but to the decorums of his rank: ſo that their beſt tragedies are made ridiculous, by changing the condition of the perſons of the drama; which

could not be ſo eaſily effected if they ſpoke the language of paſſion, which in all ranks of men is much alike. This kind of exterior repreſentation falls intirely ſhort of the intention of the drama; and indeed many plays are little more than poems rehearſed; and the theatrical decorations are uſed rather to improve the ſpectacle, than to aſſiſt the drama of which the poet remains the apparent hero. We are told by a French critic, that the great pleaſure of their audience ariſes from a reflection on the difficulty of rhyming in that language.—If that be the caſe, it is plain neither the French tragedians endeavour at, or their audience expect from them, the true perfections of drama. For, by the ſame rule, if Hercules was repreſented under the difficulties of performing any of the taſks enjoined by Euryſtheus, the attention of the audience would not be engaged ſo much to the means by which he atchieved his heroic labours, as to the ſweat and toil of the poet in his cloſet, in aſſorting male and female rhymes. We have already remarked, that the more we revert from the ſtage to the poet, the leſs we ſhall be affected with what is acted; and therefore if the difficulty of rhyme, and its apparent difference from the common language of

of dialogue, be ſuch as continually to ſet the art and the artiſt before ourſelves, the ſpecific merit of a piece intended to conceal the poet, and repreſent certain perſons and events, does not in any degree, exiſt in ſuch compoſitions. Sophocles certainly unfolds the fatal myſtery of the birth of Œdipus with great art: but our intereſt in the play ariſes not from reflection on the conduct of the poet, but is the effect of his making us alternately hope and fear for this guiltleſs, unhappy man. We wait with trembling expectation for the anſwer of the oracle, and for the teſtimony of Phorbas, becauſe we imagine that the deſtiny of Oedipus, and the fate of Thebes, depend on them: if we conſidered it merely as the contrivance of the poet, we ſhould be as unconcerned at the unravelling of the plot, as about the explication of a riddle.

The affectation of elaborate art is certainly among the falſe refinements of the modern ſtage.—The firſt maſters in theatrical repreſentaitons made uſe of a diction, which united the harmony of verſe to the eaſy and natural air of proſe, and was ſuited to the movement, and buſtle of action, being conſidered only as ſubſervient to the

fable, and not as the principal object of the poet or the audience.

The first endeavour of the poet should be to touch the heart, and next to mend it. What would the ancients say, who would not suffer even the inarticulate sounds of music, to utter tones that might enervate the mind, if they could hear the stage, from whence issued precepts that awakened the magistrate, animated the chief, and improved the citizen, now giving lessons of love; and the dramatic art, no longer attempting to purge the passions by pity and terror, but by false delicacy divested of its power, and diverted from its end, melting away in the strains of elegy and eclogue? May we not venture to affirm such refinements to be rather abuse and degeneracy. than advances towards perfection? These poets have plainly neglected the moral ends which were the object of the drama; and the manner of conducting their tragedy seems no less a deviation from that which the great poets practised, and the best critics taught. If they have avoided monstrous errors and absurdities, it is but the common privilege of mediocrity to do so; but let not mediocrity assume the airs and presumption of excellence and perfection, nor pretend to obtrude on others, as rules,

any

any fantaſtical forms which affectation of faſhion may have impoſed on them.

It cannot be denied, but there ſhould be ſome complaiſance to the change of manners and opinions. Our delicacy would be juſtly offended, if the loud groans and nauſeous wounds of Philoctetes were imitated on the ſtage; but would good ſenſe be leſs offended, if, in the conduct of the play, his fierce reſentment of his wrongs, the noble frankneſs of the ſon of Achilles, and the crafty wiles of Ulyſſes, which are ſo finely exhibited in the tragedy of Sophocles, and ſo deeply intereſt us in the diſpute for the arrows, were all neglected, in order to engage our attention to ſome love-ſcenes between Neoptolemus, and a fair nymph of Lemnos? Would the poet be excuſed by pleading the effeminacy and gallantry of an audience, who would not endure ſo unpleaſing an object as a wounded man, nor attend to any conteſt but about a heart? In ſuch a country the lyre ſhould warble melting ſtrains: but let not example teach us to fetter the energy, and enervate the nobler power of the Britiſh muſe, and of a language fit to expreſs ſublimer ſentiments. The bleeding, ſightleſs eyes of Œdipus are objects of too great horror

horror for the ſpectator; but is not Theſeus, in the midſt of plagues and famine, adoring les beaux yeux of the princeſs Dirce as much an object of ridicule?

Fine dialogues of love, interwoven with a tale of inceſt and murder, would not have been indured in any country where taſte had not been abſolutely perverted. Mr. Voltaire has the candour to own this is a bad tragedy; but Corneille tells us, it was his good fortune to find it the general opinion, that none of his pieces were compoſed with more art: ſo little was the dramatic art underſtood in the polite court of Louis XIV. The Œdipus of Corneille is ſo far below criticiſm, that I ſhould not have taken any notice of it but as it was neceſſary to bring a ſtrong proof of the depravity of taſte in thoſe times.

Mr. Voltaire has endeavoured to convince his country men, that the metaphyſics, of love, and the ſophiſtry of politics, are not adapted to the theatre: but he durſt not bring the ſtory of Œdipus on the ſtage without ſome love ſcenes; and Philoctetes, the companion of Hercules, is introduced ſighing for the autumnal charms

charms of Jocaſta.——One may ſurely ſay with her,

JOCASTA.

D'un lien charmant le ſoin tendre & timide
Ne dut point occuper le ſucceſſeur d'Alcide.

Tragedy, thus converted into mere amorous ditty, drops all the ends of her inſtitution, which were, ſays Sir P. Sydney †, "to open the greateſt wounds, and to ſhew "forth the ulcers that are covered with "tiſſue; to make kings fear to be tyrants, "tyrants to manifeſt their tyrannical hu-"mours; that ſtirring the effects of admi-"ration and commiſeration, teacheth the "uncertainty of this world, and upon how "weak foundations gilded roofs are build-"ed; that maketh us know, qui ſceptra "ſævus duro imperio regit, timet timen-"tes, metus in autorem redit." The example to the great; the warnings to the people; all high and public precepts are neglected; and by making the intereſt of the play turn upon the paſſion of love, to which the man, the prince, the hero, is made to ſacrifice every other conſideration, even private morals are corrupted. Of this we ſhall be perfectly convinced, if we compare the conduct and ſentiments of

† Defence of Poeſy.

Theſeus,

Theſeus, and of the unfortunate daughter of Jocaſta, in Antigone, and Œdipus Coloneus, with the Theſeus and Dirce of Corneille; where the enamoured pair diſclaim all other regards and duties, human and divine, for the character of mere lovers. In this play, great violence is done to the character of the perſons, to which Horace, and all good critics preſcribe a moſt exact adherence. And though the Romans, who had conquered all other nations, had the beſt right to prefer their own manners, and deſpiſe thoſe of other countries, yet their critics inculcated the neceſſity of imitating thoſe of the people repreſented.

The French tragedians not only deviate from the character of the individual repreſented, but even from the general character of the age and country. Theſeus and Achilles are not only unlike to Theſeus and Achilles, but they are not Greeks. Sophocles and Euripides never introduce a hero who had appeared in the Iliad or Odyſſey, without a ſtrict attention to making him act ſuitably to the opinion conceived of him from thoſe epic poems. When Ulyſſes, in the tragedy of Hecuba, comes to demand Polixena to be ſacrificed, how admirably

is his conduct ſuited to our conceptions of him: He is cold, prudent, deaf to pity, blind to beauty, and to be moved only by conſideration of the public weal. See him in the Iphigenia of Racine, on a ſimilar occaſion, where he tells Agamemnon, *he is ready to cry*,

Je ſuis pret de pleurer;

and examine whether there appears any thing of Ulyſſes upon the ſtage but his name. Nor is there a greater reſemblance between the French and Greek Achilles. Euripides paints him with a peculiar frankneſs and warmth of character, abhorrent of fraud, and highly provoked when he diſcovers his name has been uſed in a deceit. When he ſees Iphigenia preferring the good of her country, and an immortal fame to the pleaſures of life, he is then ſtruck with ſentiments ſo ſuitable to the greatneſs of his own mind; and, in the ſtyle of a hero and a Greek, expreſſes how glad he ſhould have been of ſuch a bride. The Achilles of Racine is not diſtinguiſhed from any young lover of ſpirit; yet this is one of the beſt French tragedies.

It is uſual to compliment Corneille with having added dignity to the Romans; and he has undoubtedly given them a certain ſtrained

ſtrained elevation of ſentiment and expreſſion, which has perhaps a theatrical greatneſs; but this is not Roman dignity, nor ſuitable to the character of republicans; for, as the excellent Biſhop of Cambray obſerves*, hiſtory repreſents the Romans great and high in ſentiment, but ſimple, modeſt, natural in words, and very unlike the bombaſt, turgid heroes of romance. A great man, ſays he, does not declaim like a comedian, his expreſſions in converſation are juſt and ſtrong; he utters nothing low, nor any thing pompous. Auguſtus Cæſar, repreſented to a barbarous audience, would command more reſpect, if ſeated on the Mogul's golden throne, ſparkling with gems, than in the curule chair, to which power, not pomp, gave dignity. It is a degree of barbariſm to aſcribe nobleneſs of mind to arrogance of phraſe, or inſolence of manners. There is a certain expreſſion of ſtyle and behaviour which verges towards barbariſm; a ſtate to which we may approach by roads that riſe, as well as by thoſe that fall. An European monarch would think it as unbecoming him to be ſtyled light of the world, glory of nations, and ſuch other ſwelling additions, aſſumed by the Aſiatic

* Lettres ſur l'Eloquence, &c.

princes,

princes, as to be called the tamer of horſes, or the ſwift-footed, like the heroes of Homer.

Pere Brumoy ſeems to be very ſenſible of Corneille's miſrepreſentation of the Roman character, though he ſpeaks of it in all the ambiguity of language which prudence could ſuggeſt, to one who was thwarting a national opinion †. He talks of *un raffinement de fierté* in the Romans, and aſks, if they are of this globe, or ſpirits of a ſuperior world? The Greeks of Racine, ſays he, are not indeed of that univerſe which belonged only to Corneille; but with what pleaſure does he make us behold ourſelves in the perſons he preſents to us! and how agreeably would the heroes of antiquity be ſurpriſed to find themſelves adorned by new manners, not indeed like their own, but which yet do not miſbecome them!

It can hardly be ſuppoſed that a critic of Pere Brumoy's taſte did not mean to convey an oblique cenſure in theſe obſervations. The tragic poet is not to let his Pegaſus, like the Hippogriffe of Aſtolpho, carry him to the moon; he is to repreſent

† Theatre Grec. par Brumoy.

men

men ſuch as they were; and indeed, when the fable and manners do not agree, great improprieties and perfect incredibility enſue.

If a Grecian fable is choſen, Grecian manners ſhould accompany it. A ſuperficial decorum is kept up if Agamemnon appears a great chief; but he ſhould be a Greek chief too, if he is to ſacrifice his daughter to Diana. The ſame magnanimity of ſentiment might certainly have been found in Guſtavus Adolphus, and in other generals; but then how monſtrous would appear the great cataſtrophe of the play!

If Shakeſpear had not preſerved the Roman character and ſentiments, in his play of the death of Julius Cæſar, we ſhould have abhorred Brutus as an aſſaſſin, who by this artifice appears a tyrannicide: and had not Mr. Addiſon made Cato a patriot, according to the Roman mode, we ſhould think he was mad for killing himſelf becauſe Cæſar was likely to become perpetual dictator.

It is difficult to ſympathize with a man's paſſions, without adopting, for the time, his

his opinions, cuſtoms, and prejudices: but it is certainly neceſſary to exhibit the man as ſtrongly tinctured with thoſe prejudices and cuſtoms as poſſible.

To all but ſuperficial critics, would it not appear as ridiculous to ſee Theſeus and Achilles wear French manners as a French dreſs? A little reflection would ſhew it is more ſo: for there are relations between manners and ſentiments, and none between dreſs and ſentiment.

It is ſtrange that painters, who are to give the mute inanimate figure, are required to be rigid obſervers of the Coſtumi, and the dramatic poet who is to imitate ſentiment, diſcourſe, and action, ſhould be allowed to neglect them.

ON

ON THE

HISTORICAL

D R A M A.

Nec minimum meruere decus, veſtigia Græca
Auſi deſerere, et celebrare domeſtica facta.

ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA.

THOSE dramas of Shakeſpear, which he diſtinguiſhes by the name of his hiſtories, being of an original kind and peculiar conſtruction, cannot come within any rules which are prior to their exiſtance. The office of the critic, in regard to poetry, is like that of the grammarian and rhetorician in reſpect to the language: it is their buſineſs to ſhew why ſuch and ſuch modes of ſpeech are proper and graceful, others improper and ungraceful: but they pronounce only on ſuch words and expreſſions as are actually extant.

The rules of Ariſtotle were drawn from the tragedies of Æſchylus, Sophocles, &c. Had that great critic ſeen a play ſo faſhioned on the chronicles of his country, thus repreſentative

repreſentative of the manners of the times, and characters of the moſt illuſtrious perſons concerned in a ſeries of important events, perhaps he would have eſteemed ſuch a ſort of drama well worth his attention, as very peculiarly adapted to thoſe ends which the Grecian philoſophers propoſed in popular entertainments. If it be the chief uſe of hiſtory, that it teaches philoſophy by experience, this ſpecies of hiſtory muſt be allowed to be the beſt preceptor. The cataſtrophe of theſe plays is not derived from a vain and idle fable of the wrath of Juno, or the revenge of ſlighted Bacchus; nor is a man repreſented entangled in the web of fate, from which his virtues and his deities cannot extricate him: but here we are admoniſhed to obſerve the conſequences of pride and ambition, the tyrant's dangers and the traitor's fate. The ſentiments and the manners, the paſſions and their conſequences, are openly expoſed and immediately united: the force and luſtre of poetical language join with the weight and authority of hiſtory, to impreſs the moral leſſon on the heart. The poet collects, as it were, into a focus thoſe truths, which lie ſcattered in the diffuſe volume of the hiſtorian, and

and kindles the flame of virtue, while he ſhews the miſeries and calamities of vice.

The common intereſts of humanity make us attentive to every ſtory that has an air of reality, but we are more affected if we know it to be true; and the intereſt is ſtill heightened if we have any relation to the perſons concerned. Our noble countryman, Percy, engages us much more than Achilles, or any Grecian hero. The people for whoſe uſe theſe public entertainments ſhould be chiefly intended, know the battle of Shrewſbury to be a fact: they are informed of what has paſſed on the banks of the Severn; all that happened on the ſhore of the Scamander has to them the appearance of a fiction.

As the misfortunes of nations as well as of individuals often ariſe from their peculiar diſpoſitions, cuſtoms, prejudices, and vices, theſe home born dramas are excellently calculated to correct them. The Grecian tragedies are ſo much eſtabliſhed on their mythology as to be very improper on our ſtage. The paſſion of Phædra and the death of Hippolytus, occaſioned by the interpoſition of Venus and Neptune, wear the apparent marks of fiction;

and when we ceaſe to believe, we ceaſe to be affected.

The nature of the hiſtorical play gave ſcope to the extenſive talents of Shakeſpear. He had an uncommon felicity in painting manners and developing characters, which he could employ with peculiar grace and propriety, when he exhibited the chiefs in our civil wars. The great Earl of Warwick, Cardinal Beaufort, Humphrey Duke of Glouceſter, the renowned Hotſpur, were very intereſting objects to their countrymen. Whatever ſhewed them in a ſtrong light, and repreſented them with ſentiments and manners agreeable to their hiſtorical characters; and thoſe things common fame had divulged of them, muſt have engaged the attention of the ſpectator, and aſſiſted in that deluſion of his imagination from whence his ſympathies with the ſtory muſt ariſe. We are affected by the cataſtrophe of a ſtranger, we lament the deſtiny of an Œdipus, and the misfortunes of an Hecuba; but the little peculiarities of character touch us only where we have ſome nearer affinity to the perſon than the common relation of humanity: nor, unleſs we are particularly acquainted with the original character, can theſe

theſe diſtinguiſhing marks have the merit of heightening the reſemblance and animating the portrait.

We are apt to conſider Shakeſpear only as a poet; but he is certainly one of the greateſt moral philoſophers that ever lived.

Euripides was highly eſteemed for the moral ſentences with which he has interſperſed the ſpeeches in his tragedies; and certainly many general truths are expreſſed in them with a ſententious brevity. But he rather collects general opinions into maxims, and gives them a form which is eaſily retained by memory, than extracts any new obſervations from the characters in action, which every reader of penetration will find our author do continually; and when he introduces a general maxim, it ſeems forced from him by the occaſion. As it ariſes out of the action, it loſes itſelf again in it, and remains not, as in other writers, an ambitious ornament glittering alone, but is ſo connected as to be an uſeful paſſage very naturally united with the ſtory. The inſtances of this are ſo frequent as to occur almoſt in every ſcene of his beſt plays. But leſt I ſhould be miſunderſtood, I will quote one from the ſecond

part of Henry IV. where the general maxim is, that

An habitation giddy and unſure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.

YORK.

Let us on:
And publiſh the occaſion of our arms
The commonwealth is ſick of their own choice:
Their over greedy love hath ſurfeited.
An habitation giddy and unſure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.
Oh thou fond many! with what loud applauſe.
Did'ſt thou beat heav'n with bleſſing Bolingbroke,
Before he was, what thou would'ſt have him be!
And now, being trim'd up in thine own deſires,
Thou, beaſtly feeder, art ſo full of him,
That thou provok'ſt thyſelf to caſt him up.
So, ſo, thou common dog, didſt thou diſgorge
Thy glutton boſom of the royal Richard,
And now thou would'ſt eat thy dead vomit up,
And howl'ſt to find it. What truſt in theſe times?
They that when Richard liv'd would have him die,
Are now become enamour'd on his grave:
Thou that throwd'ſt duſt upon his goodly head,
When through proud London he came ſighing on
After the admired heels of Bolingbroke,
Cry'ſt now, O earth, yield us that king again,
And take thou this.

Moral reflections may be more frequent in this kind of drama, than in the other ſpecies of tragedy, where, if not very ſhort, they teaze the ſpectator, whoſe mind is intent upon, and impatient for the cataſtrophe;

taſtrophe; and unleſs they ariſe neceſſarily out of the circumſtances the perſon is in, they appear unnatural. For in the preſſure of extreme diſtreſs, a perſon is intent only on himſelf, and on the preſent exigence. The various intereſts and characters in theſe hiſtorical plays, and the mixture of the comic, weaken the operations of pity and terror, but introduce various opportunities of conveying moral inſtruction, as occaſion is given to a variety of reflections and obſervations, more uſeful in common life than thoſe drawn from the conditions of kings and heroes, and perſons greatly ſuperior to us by nature or fortune.

As there are poets of various talents, and readers of various taſtes, one would rather wiſh all the fields of Parnaſſus might be free and open to men of genius, than that a proud and tyrannical ſpirit of criticiſm ſhould controul us in the uſe of any of them. Thoſe which we ſhould have judged moſt barren, have brought forth noble productions, when cultivated by an able hand.

Even fairy land has produced the ſublime; and the wild regions of romance

have ſometimes yielded juſt and genuine ſentiments.

To write a perfect tragedy, a poet muſt be poſſeſſed of the pathetic or the ſublime; or perhaps to attain the utmoſt excellence, muſt by a more uncommon felicity, be able to give to the ſublime the fineſt touches of paſſion and tenderneſs, and to the pathetic the dignity of the ſublime. The ſtraining a moderate or feeble genius to theſe arduous taſks, has produced the moſt abſurd bombaſt, and the moſt pitiable nonſenſe that has ever been conceived. Ariſtotle's rules, like Ulyſſes' bow, are held forth to all pretenders to tragedy, who as unfortunate as Penelope's ſuitors, only betray their weakneſs by an attempt ſuperior to their ſtrength, or ill adapted to their faculties. Why ſhould not poetry, in all her different forms, claim the ſame indulgence as her ſiſter art? The niceſt connoiſſeurs in painting have applauded every maſter, who has juſtly copied nature. Had Michael Angelo's bold pencil been dedicated to drawing the Graces or Rembrandt's to trace the ſoft bewitching ſmile of Venus, their works had probably proved very contemptible. Faſhion does not ſo eaſily impoſe on our ſenſes as it miſ-

leads

leads our jubgment. Truth of deſign, and natural colouring, will always pleaſe the eye; we appeal not here to any ſet of rules, but in an imitative art require only juſt imitation, with a certain freedom and energy, which is always neceſſary to form a compleat reſemblance to the pattern which is borrowed from nature. I will own, the figures of gods and goddeſſes, graceful nymphs, and beautiful Cupids, are finer ſubjects for the pencil than ordinary human forms; yet if the painter imparts to theſe a reſemblance to celebrated perſons, throws them into their proper attitudes, and gives a faithful copy of the Coſtumi of the age and country, his work will create ſenſations of a different, but not leſs pleaſing kind than thoſe excited by the admiration of exquiſite beauty and perfect excellence of workmanſhip. Perhaps he ſhould rather be accounted a nice virtuoſo than a conſummate critic, who prefers the poet or ſculptor's faireſt idea to the various and extenſive merits of the hiſtoric repreſentation.

Nothing great is to be expected from any ſet of artiſts, who are to give only copies of copies. The treaſures of nature are inexhauſtible, as well in moral as in

phyſical ſubjects. The talents of Shakeſpear were univerſal, his penetrating mind ſaw through all characters; and, as Mr. Pope ſays of him, he was not more a maſter of our ſtrongeſt emotions than of our idleſt ſenſations.

One cannot wonder, that endued with ſo great and various powers, he broke down the barriers that had before confined the dramatic writers to the regions of comedy or tragedy. He perceived the fertility of the ſubjects that lay between the two extreams; he ſaw, that in the hiſtorical play he could repreſent the manners of the whole people, give the general temper of the times, and bring in view the incidents that affected the common fate of his country. The Gothic muſe had a rude ſpirit of liberty, and delighted in painting popular tumults, the progreſs of civil wars, and the revolutions of government, rather than a cataſtrophe within the walls of a palace. At the time he wrote, the wars of the Houſes of York and Lancaſter were freſh in mens minds. They had received the tale from ſome Neſtor in their family, or neighbourhood, who had fought in the battle he related. Every ſpectator's affections were ranged under the white or red

Roſe

Roſe, in whoſe contentions ſome had loſt their parents and friends, others had gained eſtabliſhments and honours.

All the inducements which the Greek tragedians had to chuſe their heroes from the works of the poets who had ſung the wars of Troy, and the Argonautic expedition, were ſtill in greater force with our countryman to take his ſubjects from the hiſtory and traditions of thoſe more recent tranſactions, in which the ſpectator was informed and intereſted more perſonally and locally. There was not a family ſo low, that had not ſome of its branches torn off in the ſtorms of theſe inteſtine commotions: nor a valley ſo happily retired, that at ſome time, *the foot of hoſtile paces had not bruis'd her flow'rets.* In theſe characters the rudeſt peaſant read the ſad hiſtory of his country, while the better ſort were informed of the moſt minute circumſtances by our chronicles. The tragedians who took their ſubjects from Homer, had all the advantage a painter would have, who was to draw a picture from a ſtatue of Phidias or Praxiteles. Poor Shakeſpear from the wooden images in our mean chronicles was to form his portraits. What judgment was there in diſcovering, that

by moulding them to an exact reſemblance he ſhould engage and pleaſe! And what diſcernment and penetration into characters, and what amazing ſkill in moral painting, to be able from ſuch uncouth models, to bring forth not only a perfect, but when occaſion required, a graceful ſikeneſs!

The patterns from whence he drew, were not only void of poetical ſpirit and ornament, but alſo of the hiſtorical dignity. The hiſtories of theſe times were a mere heap of rude undigeſted annals, coarſe in their ſtyle, and crouded with trivial anecdotes. No Tacitus had inveſtigated the obliquites of our ſtateſmen, or by diving into the profound ſecrets of policy had dragged into light the latent motives, the ſecret machinations of our politicians: yet how does he enter into the deepeſt myſteries of ſtate! There cannot be a ſtronger proof of the ſuperiority of his genius over the hiſtorians of the times than the following inſtance.

The learned Sir Thomas More in his hiſtory of Crook'd-Back Richard, tells, with the garrulity of an old nurſe, the current ſtories of this king's deformity, and the monſtrous appearances of his infancy,

cy, which he ſeems with ſuperſtitious credulity to believe to have been the omens and prognoſticks of his future villainy. Shakeſpear with a more philoſophic turn of mind, conſiders them not as preſaging, but as inſtigating his cruel ambition, and finely accounts in the following ſpeeches for the aſperity of his temper, and his fierce and unmitigated deſire of dominion, from his being by his perſon diſqualified for the ſofter engagements of ſociety.

GLOUCESTER.

Well, ſay there is no kingdom then for Richard:
What other pleaſure can the world afford?
I'll make my heaven on a lady's lap;
And deck my body in gay ornaments,
And 'witch ſweet ladies with my words and looks.
Oh! miſerable thought! and more unlikely,
Than to accompliſh twenty golden crowns.
Why, love forſwore me in my mother's womb,
And, for I ſhould not deal in her ſoft laws,
She did corrupt frail nature with ſome bribe
To ſhrink my arm like to ſome wither'd ſhrub;
To make an envious mountain on my back,
Where ſits deformity to mock my body;
To ſhape my legs of an uneven ſize;
To diſproportion me in every part.
Like to a chaos, or unlick'd bear-whelp
That carries no impreſſion like the dam.
And am I then a man to be belov'd?
Oh monſtrous fault to harbour ſuch a thought!
Then ſince the world affords no joy to me,
But to command, to check, to o'er-bear ſuch
As are of better perſon than myſelf;

I'll make my heav'n to dream upon the crown,
And while we live to account this world but hell,
Untill the miſhap'd trunk that bears this head
Be round impaled with a glorious crown.

[Henry VI. Act 3d, Scene 3d.

GLOUCESTER.

The midwife wonder'd, and the women cry'd,
Oh Jeſus bleſs us, he is born with teeth!
And ſo I was, which plainly ſignified
That I ſhould ſnarl, and bite, and play the dog:
Then ſince the heavens have ſhap'd my body ſo,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to anſwer it.
I have no brother, I am like no brother,
And that word, love, which grey-beards call divine,
Be reſident in men like one another,
And not in me: I am myſelf alone.

[Henry VI. Act 5th, Scene 7th.

Our author by following minutely the chronicles of the times has embarraſſed his dramas with too great a number of perſons and events. The hurley-burley of theſe plays recommended them to a rude illiterate audience, who, as he ſays, loved a noiſe of targets. His poverty, and the low condition of the ſtage (which at that time was not frequented by perſons of rank) obliged him to this complaiſance; and unfortunately he had not been tutored by any rules of art, or informed by acquaintance with juſt and regular dramas. Even the politer ſort by reading books of chivalry,

ry, which were the polite literature of the times, were accuſtomed to bold adventures and atchievments. In our northern climates heroic adventures pleaſed more than the gallant dialogue, where love and honour diſpute with all the ſophiſtry of the ſchools, and one knows not when the conteſt would end, if heraldry did not ſtep in and decide the point, as in the ſoliloquy of the Infanta in the Cid.

L'INFANTE.

T'écoutrai-je encor, reſpect de ma naiſſance,
Qui fais un crime de mes feux ?
T'écouterai-je, amour, dont la douce puiſſance
Contre ce fier tyran fait rebeller mes vœux ?
Pauvre princeſſe, auquel des deux
Dois-tu prêter obéiſſance ?
Rodrigue, ta valeur te rend digne de moi ;
Mais pour être vaillant tu n'es pas fils de roi.
Le Cid, Acte 5me.

Nor is this rule, that a princeſs can love only the ſon of a king, a mere Spaniſh punto; you ſhall hear two Spartan virgins, daughters of Lyſander, ſpeaking the ſame language.

ELPINICE.

Cotys eſt roi, ma ſœur ; & comme ſa couronne
Parle ſuffiſamment pour lui,
Aſſuré de mon cœur que ſon trône lui donne,
De le trop demander il s'épargne l'ennui.

This

This lady then proceeds to queſtion her ſiſter concerning her inclination for her lover Spitridates, and urges in his favour;

ELPINICE.

Car enfin, Spitridate a l'entretien charmant,
L'œil vif, l'eſprit aiſé, le cœur bon, l'ame belle;
A tant de qualités s'il joignoit un vrai zéle.

To which the other anſwers,

AGLATIDE.

Ma ſœur, il n'eſt pas roi comme l'eſt votre amant.
Il n'eſt pas roi, vous dis-je, & c'eſt un grand defaut*.

The Queen of the Luſitanians, in the famous play of Sertorius, ſpeaks thus to that Roman general;

VIRITATE

Car enfin pour remplir l'honneur de ma naiſſance,
Il me faudroit un roi de titre, & de puiſſance;
Mais comme il n'en eſt plus, je penſe m'en devoir,
Ou le pouvoir ſans nom, ou le nom ſans pouvoir.

And upon the effect of this prudent deciſion turns the great intereſt of the play. By the laws of Romance the men are to be amorous, and the ladies ambitious. Poor Sertorius in his old age is in love with this lady, for whom Perpenna is alſo dying; and Sertorius whom we had ſuppoſed ſacrificed to the ambition of his lieutenant, is the victim of his jealouſy.

Shakeſpear

* Ageſilaus of Corneille.

Shakeſpear and Corneille are equally blameable, for having complied with the bad taſte of the age; and by doing ſo, they have both brought unmerited cenſures on their country. The French impute barbarity and cruelty, to a people that could delight in bloody ſkirmiſhes on the ſtage. The Engliſh, as unjuſtly, but as excuſably, accuſe of effeminacy and frivolouſneſs, thoſe who could ſit to hear the following addreſs of a lover to his miſtreſs's bodkin, with which ſhe had juſt put out one of his eyes:

PYMANTE.

O toi, qui ſecondant ſon courage inhumain,
Loin d'orner ſes cheveux, deſhonores ſa main,
Exécrable inſtrument de ſa brutale rage,
Tu devais pour le moins reſpecter ſon image:
Ce portrait accompli d'un chef-d'œuvre des cieux;
Imprimé dans mon cœur, exprimé dans mes yeux,
Quoi que te comnandât une ame ſi cruelle,
Devait être adoré de ta pointe rèbelle.

Clitandre de Corneille.

The whole ſoliloquy includes ſeventy lines. I heartily wiſh for the honour of both nations, the lover and his bodkin, and the ſoldiers and their halberds, had always been hiſſed off the ſtage. Our countryman was betrayed into his error by want of judgment, to diſcern what part of his

his ſtory was not fit for repreſentation. Corneille, for want of dramatic genius, was obliged to have recourſe to points, conceits, cold and unintereſting declamations to fill up his plays, and theſe heavily drag along his undramatical dramas to a fifth act.

The ignorance of the times paſſed over the defects of each author; and the bad taſte then prevalent did more than endure, it even encouraged and approved what ſhould have been cenſured.

Mr. Voltaire has ſaid, that the plots of Shakeſpear's plays are as wild as that of the Clitandre juſt quoted; and it muſt be allowed they are often exceptionable, but at the ſame time we muſt obſerve, that though crowded too much, they are not ſo perplexed as to be unintelligible, which Corneile confeſſes his Clitandre might be to thoſe who ſaw it but once. There is ſtill another more eſſential difference perhaps, which is, that the wildeſt and moſt incorrect pieces of our poet contain ſome incomparable ſpeeches: whereas the worſt plays of Corneille have not a good ſtanza. The tragedy of King Lear is very far from being a regular piece, yet there are ſpeeches in

in it which perhaps excel any thing that has been written by any tragedian, ancient or modern. However we will only compare one paſſage of it at preſent, with another in Clitandre; as they both happen to be on ſimilar ſubjects. The blinded lover, after many complaints, and wiſhes for revenge, hears the noiſe of a tempeſt, and thus he breaks out:

PYMANTE.

Mes menaces déja ſont trembler tout le monde:
Le vent fuit d'épouvante, et le tonnetre en gronde:
L'œil du ciel s'en retire, et par un voile noir,
N'y pouvant réſiſter, ſe défend d'en rien voir.
Cent nuages épais ſe diſtilant en larmes,
A force de pitié, veulant m'oter les armes.
La nature etonnée embraſſe mon couroux,
Et veut m'offrir Doriſe, ou devancer mes coups.
Tout eſt de mon parti, le ciel même n'envoie
Tant d'éclairs redoublés, qu'afin que je la voie.

King Lear, whom age renders weak and querulous, and who is now beginning to grow mad, thus very naturally, in the general calamity of the ſtorm, recurs to his own particular circumſtances.

LEAR.

Spit fire, ſpout rain;
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters;
I tax you not, ye elements, with unkindneſs,
I never gave you kingdoms, call'd you children,
You

You owe me no ſubmiſſion. Then let fall
Your horrible pleaſure; here I ſtand your ſlave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and deſpis'd old man!
And yet I call you ſervile miniſters,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high engender'd battles, 'gainſt a head
So old and white as this. Oh! oh! 'tis foul.

They muſt have little feeling that are not touched by this ſpeech ſo highly pathetic.

How fine is that which follows!

LEAR.

Let the great Gods,
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble thou wretch,
That haſt within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipt of juſtice! Hide thee thou bloody hand,
Thou perjur'd, and thou ſimular of virtue,
That art inceſtuous! Caitiff, ſhake to pieces,
That under covert, and convenient ſeeming,
Haſt practis'd on man's life! Cloſe pent up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and aſk
Theſe dreadful ſummoners grace!—I am a man
More ſinn'd againſt than ſinning.

Thus it is Shakeſpear redeems the nonſenſe, the indecorums, the irregularities of his plays; and whoever, for want of natural taſte, or ignorance in the Engliſh language, is inſenſible to the merit of theſe paſſages, is juſt as unfit to judge of his works, as a deaf man, who only perceiv-

ed

ed the blackneſs of the ſky, and did not hear the deep-voiced thunder, and the roaring elements, would have been to have deſcribed the awful horrors of this midnight ſtorm.

The French critic apologizes for our perſiſting in the repreſentation of Shakeſpear's plays, by ſaying we have none of a more regular form. In this he is extremely miſtaken; we have many plays written according to the rules of art; but nature, which ſpeaks in Shakeſpear, prevails over them all. If at one of our theatres there was a ſet of actors who gave the true force of every ſentiment, expreſſed juſtly every emotion of the heart, ſeemed inſpired with the paſſion they were to counterfeit, fell ſo naturally into the circumſtances and ſituations the poet had appointed for them, that they never betrayed they were actors, but ſometimes would have an aukward geſture, or for a moment a vicious pronunciation, ſhould we not conſtantly reſort thither?—If at another theatre there were a ſet of puppets regularly featured, exactly proportioned, whoſe movements were geometricaly juſt, that ſpoke through an organ ſo conſtituted by a great maſter of muſic as never to give any harſh or diſagreeable

greeable tones, and the faces, the action, pronunciation of theſe puppets had no fault, but that there was no expreſſion in their countenance, no natural air in their motion, and that their ſpeech had not the various inflexions of the human voice, would a real connoiſſeur abandon the living actors for ſuch lifeleſs images, becauſe ſome nice and dainty critic pleaded, that the puppets were not ſubject to any human infirmities, would not cough, ſneeze, or become hoarſe in the midſt of a fine period? or could it avail much to urge their movements and tones, being directed by juſt mechanics, would never betray the aukwardneſs of ruſticity, or a falſe accent caught from bad education.

Shakeſpear's dramatis perſonæ are men, frail by conſtitution, hurt by ill habits, faulty and unequal. But they ſpeak with human voices, are actuated by human paſſions, and are engaged in the common affairs of human life. We are intereſted in what they do, or ſay, by feeling every moment, that they are of the ſame nature as ourſelves. Their precepts therefore are an inſtruction, their fates and fortunes an experience, their teſtimony an authority, and their misfortunes a warning.

Love

Love and ambition are the ſubjects of the French plays. From the firſt of theſe paſſions many from age and temper are entirely exempted; and from the ſecond many more, by ſituation are excluded. Among a thouſand ſpectators, there are not perhaps half a dozen, who ever were, or can be, in the circumſtances of the perſons repreſented: they cannot ſympathize with them, unleſs they have ſome conception of a tender paſſion, combated by ambition, or ambition ſtruggling with love. The fable of the French plays is often taken from hiſtory, but then a romantic paſſion is added to it, and to which both events and characters are rendered ſubſervient.

Shakeſpear, in various nature wiſe, does not confine himſelf to any particular paſſion. When he writes from hiſtory, he attributes to the perſons ſuch ſentiments as agreed with their actions and characters. There is not a more ſure way of judging of the merit of rival geniuſes, than to bring them to the teſt of compariſon where they have attempted ſubjects that have any reſemblance. Corneille appears much inferior to our Shakeſpear in the art of conducting the events, and diſplaying the characters

characters he borrows from the hiſtorian's page; his tragedy of Otho comprehends that period in which his courtiers are caballing to make him adopt a ſucceſſor agreeable to their intereſts.

The court of that emperor is finely deſcribed by Tacitus, who in a few words ſets before us the inſolence, the profligacy, and rapaciouſneſs of a ſet of miniſters, encouraged by the weakneſs of the prince to attempt whatever they wiſhed, and incited by his age to ſnatch by haſty rapine whatever they coveted.——Tacitus, with his maſterly pencil, has drawn the outlines of their characters ſo ſtrongly that a writer of any genius might finiſh up the portraits to great reſemblance and perfection. One had ſurely a right to expect this from an author, who profeſſes to have copied this great hiſtorian the moſt faithfully that was poſſible. One would imagine the inſolent Martianus, the bold and ſubtle Vinius, the baſe, ſcandalous, ſlothful Laco ſhould all appear in their proper characters, which would be unfolding through the whole progreſs of the play, as their various ſchemes and intereſts were expoſed. Inſtead of this Martianus makes ſubmiſſive love: Vinius and Laco are two ambitious courtiers,

tiers, without any quality that diſtinguiſhes them from each other, or from any other intriguing ſtateſman; nor do they at all contribute to bring about the revolution in the empire: their whole buſineſs ſeems to be matchmaking, and in that too they are ſo unſkilful as not to ſucceed. They undertake it indeed, merely as it may influence the adoption. Several ſentences from Tacitus are ingrafted into the dialogues, but, from a change of perſons and circumſtances, they loſe much of their original force and beauty.

Galba addreſſes to his niece, who is in love with Otho, the fine ſpeech which the hiſtorian ſuppoſes him to have made to Piſo when he adopted him. The love-ſick lady, tired of an harangue, the purport of which is unfavourable to her lover, and being beſides no politician, anſwers the emperor, that ſhe does not underſtand ſtate-affairs: a cruel reply to a ſpeech he could have no motive for making, but to diſplay his wiſdom and eloquence. The old warrior is more complaiſant to her, for he enters into all the delicacies of her paſſion, as if he had ſtudied la carte du tendre*. To ſteal ſo much matter from Tacitus

* Roman de Clelie.

citus without imbibing one ſpark of his ſpirit; to tranſlate whole ſpeeches, yet preſerve no likeneſs in the characters, is ſurely betraying a great deficiency of dramatic powers, and of the art of imitation: to repreſent the gay, luxurious, diſſolute, ambitious Otho, the courtier of Nero, and the gallant of Poppea, as a mere Paſtor Fido, who would die rather than be inconſtant to his miſtreſs, and is indifferent to empire but for her ſake, is ſuch a violation of hiſtorical truth, as is not to be endured. I paſs over the abſurd ſcene between the jealous ladies, the improbability of their treating the powerful and haughty favourites of the emperor with indignity, and Otho's thrice repeated attempt to kill himſelf before his miſtreſs's face without the leaſt reaſon why he ſhould put an end to his life, or probability that ſhe would ſuffer him to do it. To make minute criticiſms where the great parts are ſo defective would be trifling.

Having obſerved how poorly Corneille has repreſented characters borrowed from ſo great a portrait painter as Tacitus, let us now ſee what Shakeſpear has done, from thoſe aukward originals, our old chronicles.

ON

ON THE

FIRST PART

OF

HENRY IV.

THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

THE peculiar dexterity with which the author unfolds the characters, and prepares the events of this play, deſerves our attention.

There is not, perhaps, any thing more difficult in the whole compaſs of the dramatic art, than to open to the ſpectator the previous incidents that were productive of the preſent circumſtances, and the characters of the perſons from whoſe conduct in ſuch circumſtances, the ſubſequent events are to flow. An intelligent ſpectator will receive great pleaſure from obſerving every action naturally ariſing out of

the ſentiments and manners of the perſons repreſented. Happier is the poet, the perplexities of whoſe fable are unfolded by the natural operation of the diſpoſitions of the perſons who compoſe it, than even he, to whom it is permitted to call a deity to his aſſiſtance. This play opens by the king's declaring his intention to undertake the cruſade, as ſoon as peace will allow him to do it. Weſtmorland informs him of the defeat of Mortimer by Owen Glendower; the king relates the news of Percy's victory at Holmedon, which naturally leads him to the praiſe of this young hero, and to expreſs an envy of Lord Northumberland's happineſs.

> To be the father of ſo bleſt a ſon,
> While I (ſays he)
> See riot and diſhonour ſtain the brow
> Of my young Harry:

then he mentions Percy's refuſal of his priſoners, which Weſtmorland attributes to the malevolent ſuggeſtions of Worceſter. Thus at once is preſented to the ſpectator, the condition of the ſtate, the temper of the times, and the characters of the perſons from whence the cataſtrophe is to ariſe.

The ſtern authority the king aſſumes on Hotſpur's diſobedience to his commands, could

could not fail to inflame a warm young hero flushed with recent victory, and elate with the conſciouſneſs of having ſo well defended a crown, which his father and uncle had in a manner conferred. Nothing can be more natural than that, in ſuch a temper, he ſhould recur to the obligations the king had received from his family: and thus while he ſeems venting his ſpleen, he explains to the ſpectator what is paſt, and opens the ſource of the future rebellion; and by connecting former tranſactions with the preſent paſſions and events, creates in the reader an intereſt and a ſympathy, which a cold narration or a pompous declamation could not have effected. As the Author deſigned Percy ſhould be an intereſting character, his diſobedience to the king, in regard to the priſoners, is mitigated by his pleading the unfitneſs of the perſon and unfavorableneſs of the occaſion to urge him on the ſubject. To this effeminate courtier (ſays he)

> I then, all ſmarting with my wounds being cold,
> Out of my grief and my impatience
> To be ſo peſter'd with a popinjay,
> Anſwered neglectingly—I know not what.

Thus has the poet diveſted the rebel of the hateful crimes of premeditated revolt

and deep-laid treachery. He is hurried by an impetuoſity of ſoul out of the ſphere of obedience, and, like a comet, though dangerous to the general ſyſtem, he is ſtill an object of admiration and wonder to every beholder. It is marvellous, that Shakeſpear from bare chronicles, coarſe hiſtory, and traditional tales, could thus extract the wiſdom and caution of the politician Henry, and catch the fire of the martial ſpirit of Hotſpur. The wrath of Achilles in Homer is not ſuſtained with more dignity. Each hero is offended that the prize of valour,

Due to many a well-fought day.

is rudely ſnatched from him by the hand of power. One ſhould ſuſpect an author of more learning to have had the character of Achilles in his eye, and alſo the advice of Horace in the manner of repreſenting him on the ſtage.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.
Jura neget ſibi nata, nihil non arroget armis.

His miſdemeanors riſe ſo naturally out of his temper, and that temper is ſo noble, that we are almoſt as much intereſted for him as for a more virtuous character.

His

His treſpaſs may be well forgot,
It hath th' excuſe of youth and heat of blood,
And an adopted name of privilege,
A hare-brain'd Hotſpur govern'd by a ſpleen.

The great aſpiring ſoul of Hotſpur bears out rebellion: it ſeems, in him, to flow from an uncontrollable energy of ſoul, born to give laws, too potent to receive them. In every ſcene he appears with the ſame animation; he is always that Percy

Whoſe ſpirit lent a fire
Even to the dulleſt peaſant in the camp,
Led ancient lords and rev'rend biſhops on
To bloody battles, and to bruiſing arms.

He has too the frankneſs of Achilles, and the ſame abhorrence of falſhood; he is as impatient of Glendower's pretenſions to ſupernatural powers, as to the king's aſſuming a right over his priſoners. In dividing the kingdom he will not yield a foot of ground to thoſe who diſpute with him; but would give any thing to a well-deſerving friend. It is a pardonable violation of hiſtorical truth, to give the Prince of Wales, who behaved very gallantly at the battle of Shrewſbury, the honour of conquering him; and it is more agreeable to the ſpectator, as the event was, to beat down

The never-daunted Percy to the earth.

to ſuppoſe it did not happen from the arrow of a peaſant, but from the ſword of Henry Monmouth, whoſe ſpirit came with a higher commiſſion from the ſame fiery ſphere.

In Worceſter the rebel appears in all his odious colours; proud, envious, malignant, artful, he is finely contraſted by the noble Percy. Shakeſpear, with the ſagacity of a Tacitus, obſerves the jealouſies which muſt ariſe between a family, which has conferred a crown, and the king who has received it, who will always think the preſence of ſuch benefactors *too bold and peremptory.*

The character of Henry IV. is perfectly agreeable to that given him by hiſtorians. The play opens by his declaring his intentions to war againſt the infidels, which he does not undertake, as was uſual in thoſe times, from a religious enthuſiaſm, but is induced to it by political motives: that the martial ſpirit may not break out at home in civil wars; nor peace and idleneſs give men opportunity to enquire into his title to the crown, and too much diſcuſs a point which would not bear a cool and cloſe examination. Henry had the

ſpecious

ſpecious talents, which aſſiſt a man under certain circumſtances to uſurp a kingdom, but either from the want of thoſe great and ſolid qualities, which are neceſſary to maintain opinion loyal to the throne to which it had raiſed him, or from the impoſſibility of ſatisfying the expectations of thoſe who had aſſiſted his uſurpation, as ſome of the beſt hiſtorians with great appearance of reaſon have ſuggeſted *, it is certain his reign was full of diſcontents and troubles.

The popular arts by which he captivated the multitude, are finely deſcribed in the ſpeech he makes to his ſon, in the third act. Any other poet would have thought he had acquitted himſelf well enough in that dialogue, by a general fatherly admonition delivered with the dignity becomming a monarch: but Shakeſpear rarely deals in common-place and general morals. The peculiar temper and circumſtances of the perſon, and the exigency of the time, influence the ſpeaker as in real life. It is not only the king and parent, but Henry Plantagenet, that chides the prince of Wales. How natural is it

* Hume's Hiſt. of H. IV.

for him, on Percy's revolt, to recur to his own rebellion againſt Richard, and to apprehend that the ſame levities which loſt that king, firſt the opinion, then the allegiance of his ſubjects, ſhould deprive the prince of his ſucceſſion! Nothing can be better imagined than the parallel he draws between himſelf and Percy, Richard and Henry of Monmouth. The affectionate father, the offended king, the provident politician, and the conſcious uſurper, are all united in the following ſpeeches:

K. HENRY.

I know not, whether God will have it ſo,
For ſome diſpleaſing ſervice I have done,
That, in his ſecret doom, out of my blood
He'll breed revengement, and a ſcourge for me.
But thou do'ſt in thy paſſages of life,
Make me believe that thou art only mark'd
For the hot vengeance and the rod of heav'n,
To puniſh my miſ-treadings. Tell me, elſe
Could ſuch inordinate and low deſires,
Such poor, ſuch baſe, ſuch lewd, ſuch mean attempts,
Such barren pleaſures, rude ſociety
As thou art match'd withal, and grafted to,
Acompany the greatneſs of thy blood,
And hold their level with thy princely heart?

K. HENRY.

Heav'n pardon thee. Yet let me wonder, Harry,
At thy affections, which do hold a wing
Quite from the flight of all thy anceſtors.
Thy place in council thou haſt rudely loſt.

Which

Which by thy younger brother is ſupply'd;
And art almoſt an alien to the hearts
Of all the court and princes of my blood.
The hope and expectation of thy time
Is ruin'd, and the ſoul of every man
Prophetically does fore-think thy fall.
Had I ſo laviſh of my preſence been,
So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men,
So ſteal and cheap to vulgar company;
Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
Had ſtill kept loyal to poſſeſſion,
And left me in reputeleſs baniſhment,
A fellow of no mark, nor likelihood.
But being ſeldom ſeen, I could not ſtir,
But, like a comet, I was wonder'd at,
That men would tell their children, this is he;
Others would ſay, where? which is Bolingbroke?
And then I ſtole all courteſy from heav'n,
And dreſt myſelf in much humility,
That I did pluck allegiance from mens hearts,
Loud ſhouts and ſalutations from their mouths,
Even in the preſence of the crowned king.
Thus I did keep my perſon freſh and new,
My preſence, like a robe pontifical,
Ne'er ſeen, but wonder'd at; and ſo my ſtate,
Seldom, but ſumptuous, ſhew'd like a feaſt,
And won, by rareneſs, ſuch ſolemnity.
The ſkipping king, he ambled up and down
With ſhallow jeſters, and raſh bavin wits,
Soon kindled, and ſoon burnt; 'ſcarded his ſtate,
Mingled his royalty with carping fools;
Had his great name profaned with their ſcorns;
And gave his countenance, againſt his name,
To laugh at gybing boys, and ſtand the puſh
Of every beardleſs, vain comparative;
Grew a companion to the common ſtreets,
Enfeoff'd himſelf to popularity.
That, being daily ſwallowed by mens eyes,

They

They ſurfeited with honey, and began
To loath a taſte of ſweetneſs; whereof a little
More than a little, is by much too much.
So when he had occaſion to be ſeen;
He was but as cuckow is in June,
Heard, not regarded; ſeen, but with ſuch eyes,
As, ſick and blunted with community,
Afford no extraordinary gaze;
Such, as is bent on ſun-like majeſty,
When it ſhines ſeldom in admiring eyes;
But rather drowz'd, and hung their eye-lids down,
Slept in his face, and render'd ſuch aſpect
As cloudy men uſe to their adverſaries,
Being with his preſence glutted, gorg'd and full.
And in that very line, Harry, ſtand'ſt thou;
For thou haſt loſt thy princely privilege
With vile participation; not an eye,
But is a-weary of thy common ſight,
Save mine, which hath deſired to ſee thee more;
Which now doth, what I would not have it do,
Make blind itſelf with fooliſh tenderneſs.

Our author is ſo little under the diſcipline of art, that we are apt to aſcribe his happieſt ſucceſſes, as well as his moſt unfortunate failings, to chance. But I cannot help thinking, there is more of contrivance and care in his execution of this play, than in almoſt any he has written. It is a more regular drama than his other hiſtorical plays, leſs charged with abſurdities, and leſs involved in confuſion. It is indeed liable to thoſe objections which are made to tragi-comedy. But if the pedantry

dantry of learning could ever recede from its dogmatical rules, I think that this play inſtead of being condemned for being of that ſpecies, would obtain favour for the ſpecies itſelf, though perhaps correct taſte may be offended with the tranſitions from grave and important, to light and ludicrous ſubjects, and more ſtill with thoſe from great and illuſtrious, to low and mean perſons. Foreigners unuſed to theſe compoſitions, will be much diſguſted at them. The vulgar call all animals that are not natives of their own country, monſters, however beautiful they may be in their form, or wiſely adapted to their climate and natural deſtination. The prejudices of pride are as violent and unreaſonable as the ſuperſtitions of ignorance. On the French Parnaſſus, a tragi-comedy of this kind will be deemed a monſter fitter to be ſhewn to the people at a fair, than exhibited to circles of the learned and polite. From ſome peculiar circumſtances relating to the characters in the piece, we may, perhaps, find a ſort of apology for the motley mixture thrown into it. We cannot but ſuppoſe, that at the time it was written, many ſtories yet ſubſiſted of the wild adventures of this Prince of Wales, and his idle companions. His ſubſequent refor-

reformation, and his conqueſts in France, rendered him a very popular character. It was a delicate affair to expoſe the follies of Henry V. before a people proud of his victories, and tender of his fame, at the ſame time ſo informed of the extravagancies and exceſſes of his youth, that he could not appear diveſted of them with any degree of hiſtorical probability. Their enormity would have been greatly heightened, if they had appeared in a piece entirely ſerious and full of dignity and decorum. How happily therefore was the character of Falſtaffe introduced, whoſe wit and feſtivity in ſome meaſure excuſe the Prince for admitting him into his familiarity, and ſuffering himſelf to be led by him into ſome irregularities. There is hardly a young hero, full of gaiety and ſpirits, who, if he had once fallen into the ſociety of ſo pleaſant a companion, could have the ſeverity to diſcard him, or would not ſay, as the Prince does,

He could better ſpare a better man.

How ſkilfully does our author follow the tradition of the Prince's having been engaged in a robbery, yet make his part in it a mere frolic, to play on the cowardly and braggart temper of Falſtaffe! The whole

whole conduct of that incident is very artful: he rejects the propoſals of the robbery, and only complies with playing a trick on the robbers; and care is taken to inform you, that the money is returned to its owners.——The Prince ſeems always diverted, rather than ſeduced by Falſtaffe; he deſpiſes his vices while he is entertained by his humour: and though Falſtaffe is for a while a ſtain upon his character, yet it is of a kind with thoſe colours which are uſed for a diſguiſe in ſport, being of ſuch a nature as are eaſily waſhed out, without leaving any bad tincture. And we ſee Henry, as ſoon as he is called to the high and ſerious duties of a king, come forth at once with an unblemiſhed majeſty. The diſpoſition of the hero is made to pierce through the idle frolicks of the boy, throughout the whole play; for his reformation is not effected in the laſt ſcene of the laſt act, as is uſual in our comedies, but is prepared from the very beginning of the play. The ſcene between the Prince and Francis, is low and ridiculous, and ſeems one of the greateſt indecorums in the piece; at the ſame time the attentive ſpectator will find the purpoſe of it is to ſhew him, that Henry was ſtudying human nature in all her variety of tempers and

and faculties. I am now, ſays he, acquainted with all humours (meaning diſpoſitions) ſince the days of good man Adam to the preſent hour. In the play of Henry V. you are told, that in his youth he had been ſedulouſly obſerving mankind; and from an apprehenſion, perhaps, how difficult it was to acquire an intimate knowlege of men, whilſt he kept up the forms his rank preſcribed, he waved the ceremonies and decorums of his ſituation, and familiarly converſed with all orders of ſociety.——The jealouſy his father had conceived of him would probably have been increaſed, if he had affected ſuch a ſort of popularity as would have gained the eſteem and love of the multitude.

Whether Henry in the early part of his life was indulging a humour that inclined him to low and wild company, as endeavouring to acquire a deeper and more extenſive knowledge of human nature, by a general acquaintance with mankind, it is the buſineſs of his hiſtorians to determine. But a critic muſt ſurely applaud the dexterity of Shakeſpear for throwing this colour over that part of his conduct, whether he ſeized on ſome intimations hiſtorians had given of that ſort, or, of himſelf imagined

gined ſo reſpectable a motive for the Prince's deviations from the dignity of his birth. This piece muſt have delighted the people at the time it was written, as the follies of their favourite character were ſo managed, that they rather ſeemed foils to ſet off its virtues, than ſtains which obſcured them.

Whether we conſider the character of Falſtaffe as adapted to encourage and excuſe the extravagancies of the Prince, or by itſelf, we muſt certainly admire it, and own it to be perfectly original.

The profeſſed wit, either in life or on the ſtage, is uſually ſevere and ſatirical. But mirth is the ſource of Falſtaffe's wit. He ſeems rather to invite you to partake of his meriment, than to attend to his jeſt; a perſon muſt be ill natured, as well as dull who does not join in the mirth of this jovial companion, who is in all reſpects the beſt calculated to raiſe laughter of any that ever appeared on a ſtage.

He joins the fineſſe of wit with the drollery of humour. Humour is a kind of groteſque wit, ſhaped and coloured by the diſpoſitions of the people in whom it reſides,

ſides, or by the ſubject to which it is applied. It is oftenest found in odd and irregular minds: but this peculiar turn diſtorts wit, and though it gives it a burleſque air, which excites momentary mirth, renders it leſs juſt, and conſequently leſs agreeable to our judgments. Gluttony, corpulency and cowardice, are the peculiarities of Falſtaffe's compoſition, they render him ridiculous without folly, throw an air of jeſt and feſtivity about him, and make his manners ſuit with his ſentiments, without giving to his underſtanding any particular bias. As the contempt attendant on theſe vices and defects, is the beſt antidote againſt any infection that might be caught in his ſociety, ſo it was very ſkilful to make him as ridiculous as witty, and as contemptible as entertaining. The admirable ſpeech upon honour would have been both indecent and dangerous from any other perſon. We muſt every where allow his wit is juſt, his humour genuine, and his character perfectly original, and ſuſtained through every ſcene, in every play, in which it appears.

As Falſtaffe, whom the author certainly intended to be perfectly witty, is leſs addicted to quibble and play on words, than

than any of his comic characters, I think we may fairly conclude, our author was ſenſible it was but a falſe kind of wit, which he practiſed from the hard neceſſity of the times: for in that age, the profeſſor quibbled in his chair, the judge quibbled on the bench, the prelate quibbled in the pulpit, the ſtateſman quibbled at the council-board; nay, even majeſty quibbled on the throne.

THE

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

IT is uncommon to find the ſame ſpirit and intereſt diffuſed through the ſequel as in the firſt part of a play: but the fertile and happy mind of Shakeſpear could create or diverſify at pleaſure; could produce new characters or vary the attitudes of thoſe before exhibited according to the occaſion. He leaves us in doubt, whether moſt to admire the fecundity of his imagination in the variety of its productions, or the ſtrength and ſteadineſs of his genius in ſuſtaining the ſpirit, and preſerving unimpaired, through various circumſtances and ſituations, what his invention had originally produced.

We

We ſhall hardly find any man to-day, more like to what he was yeſterday, than the perſons here are like to what they were in the firſt part of Henry IV. This is the more aſtoniſhing, as the author has not confined himſelf, as all other dramatic writers have done, to a certain theatrical character; which, formed entirely of one paſſion, preſents to us always the patriot, the lover, or the conqueror. Theſe, ſtill turning on the ſame hinge, deſcribe, like a piece of clock-work, a regular circle of movements. In human nature, of which Shakeſpear's characters are a juſt imitation, every paſſion is controlled and forced into many deviations by various incidental diſpoſitions and humours. The operations of this complicated machine are far more difficult to trace, than the ſteady undeviating line of the artificial character, formed on one ſimple principle. Our poet ſeems to have as great an advantage over ordinary dramatic poets, as Dædalus had above his predeceſſors in ſculpture. They could make a repreſentation of the limbs and features which compoſe the human form, he firſt had the ſkill to give it geſture, attitude, the eaſy graces of real life, and exhibit its powers in a variety of exertions.

We

We ſhall again ſee Northumberland timid and wavering, forward in conſpiracy, yet heſitating to join in an action of doubtful iſſue.

King Henry is as prudent a politician on his death-bed as at council; his eye, juſt before it cloſed for ever, ſtretching itſelf beyond the hour of death, to the view of thoſe dangers, which from the temper of the Prince of Wales, and the condition of the times, threatened his throne and family. I cannot help taking notice of the remarkable attention of the poet to the cautious and politic temper of Henry, when he makes him, even in ſpeaking to his friends and partiſans, diſſemble ſo far, in relating Richard's prophecy, that Northumberland who helped him to the throne, would one day revolt from him, as to add,

> Though then, heaven knows, I had no ſuch intent;
> But that neceſſity ſo bow'd the ſtate.
> That I and greatneſs were compell'd to kiſs.

To his ſucceſſor he expreſſes himſelf very differently when he ſays,

> Heaven knows, my ſon,
> By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
> I met this crown.

Theſe delicacies of conduct lie hardly within the poet's province, but have their ſource in that great and univerſal capacity, which the attentive reader will find to belong to our author beyond any other writer. He alone, perhaps, would have perceived the decorum and fitneſs of making ſo wiſe a man reſerved even with his friends, and truſt a confeſſion of the iniquities by which he obtained the crown, only to his ſucceſſor, whoſe intereſt it was not to diſgrace whatever could authorize his attainment of it. Let tragedy-writers, who make princes prate with pages and waiting-women, of their murders and treaſons, learn for once, from rude and illiterate Shakeſpear, how averſe pride is, coolly to confeſs, and prudence to betray, what the fever and deliriums of ambition had prompted to do.

Falſtaffe appears with his former diſpoſitions, but in new ſituations; and entertains us in a variety of ſcenes.

Hotſpur is as it were revived to the ſpectator in the following character given of him by his lady, when ſhe diſſuades Northumberland from joining the forces of the archbiſhop.

Lady

Lady PERCY.

Oh, yet for heav'n's ſake, go not to theſe wars.
The time was, father, that you broke your word,
When you were more endear'd to it than now;
When your own Percy, when my heart-dear Harry,
Threw many a northward look, to ſee his father,
Bring up his pow'rs; but he did long in vain!
Who then perſuaded you to ſtay at home?
There were two honours loſt; yours and your ſon's.
For yours, may heavenly glory brighten it!
For his, it ſtruck upon him as the ſun
In the grey vault of heav'n; and by his light
Did all the chivalry of England move
To do brave acts. He was indeed the glaſs
Wherein the noble youth did dreſs themſelves.
He had no legs, that practiſed not his gait;
And ſpeaking thick, which nature made his blemiſh,
Became the accents of the valiant;
For thoſe that could ſpeak low and tardily,
Would turn their own perfection to abuſe,
To ſeem like him: So that in ſpeech, in gait,
In diet, in affections of delight,
In military rules, humours of blood,
He was the mark and glaſs, copy and book,
That faſhion'd others. And him, wond'rous him!
O miracle of men! him did you leave
To look upon the hideous god of war
In diſadvantage; to abide a field
Where nothing but the ſound of Hotſpur's name
Did ſeem defenſible. So you left him.
Never, O, never do his ghoſt the wrong.
To hold your honour more preciſe and nice
With others, than with him. Let them alone:
The marſhal and the archbiſhop are ſtrong.
Had my ſweet Harry had but half their numbers,
To day might I (hanging on Hotſpur's neck)
Have talk'd of Monmouth's grave.

Juſtice Shallow is an admirably well drawn comic character, but he never appears better, than by reflection in the mirror of Falſtaffe's wit, in whoſe deſcriptions he is moſt ſtrongly exhibited.—It is ſaid by ſome, that the Juſtice was meant for a particular gentleman who had proſecuted the author for deer-ſtealing, I know not whether that ſtory be well grounded. The Shallows are to be found every where, in every age, but thoſe who have leaſt character of their own, are moſt formed and modified by the faſhion of the times, and their peculiar profeſſion or calling. So though we often meet with a reſemblance to this Juſtice, we ſhall never find an exact parrallel to him, now manners are ſo much changed.—The ſuperior danger of a rebellion ſanctified by the church, cannot by hiſtorians or philoſophers be better ſet forth, than by the following words of Morton:

MORTON.

The gentle Archbiſhop of York is up
With well appointed powers. He is a man,
Who with a double ſurety binds his followers.
My lord, your ſon had only but the corps,
But ſhadows, and the ſhews of men to fight;
For that ſame word, rebellion did divide
The action of their bodies from their ſouls,
And they did fight with queaſineſs, conſtrain'd,

As

As men drink potions, that their weapons only
Seem'd on our ſide, but for their ſpirits and ſouls,
This word, rebellion, it had froze them up,
But now the biſhop,
Turns inſurrection to religion;
Suppos'd ſincere and holy in his thoughts,
He's follow'd both with body and with mind,
And doth enlarge his riſing with the blood
Of fair King Richard, ſcrap'd from Pomfret ſtones;
Derives from heaven his quarrel and his cauſe;
Tells them, he doth beſtride a bleeding land
Gaſping for life under great Bolingbroke,
And more, and leſs, do flock to follow him.

Nor can the indecency of a prelate's appearing in arms, and the abuſe of an authority derived from the ſacred function, be more ſtrongly arraigned, than in the ſpeeches of Weſtmorland, and John of Lancaſter.

WESTMORLAND.

Then, my lord,
Unto your grace do I in chief addreſs
The ſubſtance of my ſpeech. If that rebellion
Came like itſelf, in baſe and abject routs,
Led on by bloody youth, goaded with rage,
And countenanc'd by boys and beggary;
I ſay, if damn'd commotion ſo appear'd
In his true, native, and moſt proper ſhape,
You, reverend father, and theſe noble lords,
Had not been here to dreſs the ugly form
Of baſe and bloody inſurrection
With your fair honours. You, my lord archbiſhop,
Whoſe ſee is by a civil peace maintain'd,

Whoſe beard the ſilver hand of peace hath touch'd,
Whoſe learning and good letters peace hath tutor'd,
Whoſe white inveſtments figure innnocence,
The dove and very bleſſed ſpirit of peace;
Wherefore do you ſo ill tranſlate yourſelf,
Out of the ſpeech of peace, that bears ſuch grace,
Into the harſh and boiſt'rous tongue of war?

LANCASTER.

My lord of York, it better ſhew'd with you,
When that your flock, aſſembled by the bell,
Encircled you, to hear with reverence
Your expoſition on the holy text;
Than now to ſee you here an iron man,
Cheering a rout of rebels with your drum,
Turning the word to ſword, and life to death.
That man that ſits within a monarch's heart,
And ripens in the ſun-ſhine of his favour,
Would he abuſe the count'nance of the king,
Alack, what miſchiefs might he ſet abroach,
In ſhadow of ſuch greatneſs? With you, lord biſhop,
It is ev'n ſo. Who hath not heard it ſpoken,
How deep you were within the books of heav'n?
To us, the ſpeaker in his parliament,
To us, th' imagin'd voice of heav'n itſelf,
The very opener and intelligencer
Between the grace, the ſanctities of heav'n,
And our dull workings: O, who ſhall believe
But you miſuſe the rev'rence of your place,
Employ the countenance and grace of heav'n,
As a falſe favourite doth his prince's name,
In deeds diſhonourable? You've taken up,
Under the counterfeited zeal of God,
The ſubjects of his ſubſtitute, my father;
And both againſt the peace of heav'n and him,
Have here up-ſwarm'd them.

The

The archbiſhop of York, even when he appears an iron man, keeps up the gravity and ſeeming ſanctity of his character, and wears the mitre over his helmet. He is not like Hotſpur, a valiant rebel, full of noble anger and fierce defiance, he ſpeaks like a cool politician to his friends, and like a deep deſigning hypocrite to his enemies, and pretends he is only acting as phyſician to the ſtate.

I have before obſerved, that Shakeſpear had the talents of an orator as much as of a poet; and I believe it will be allowed the ſpeeches of Weſtmorland and Lancaſter are as proper on this occaſion, and the particular circumſtances are as happily touched as they could have been by the moſt judicious orator. I know not that any poet, ancient or modern, has ſhewn ſo perfect a judgment in rhetoric as our countryman. I wiſh he had employed his eloquence too in arraigning the baſeneſs and treachery of John of Lancaſter's conduct, in breaking his covenant with the rebels.

Piſtol is an odd kind of perſonage, intended, I ſuppoſe, to ridicule ſome faſhionable affectation of bombaſt language.

When ſuch characters exiſt no longer any where, but in the writings in which they have been ridiculed, they ſeem to have been monſter's of the poet's brain. The originals loſt and the mode forgot, one can neither praiſe the imitation, nor laugh at the ridicule. Comic writers ſhould therefore always exhibit ſome characteriſtic diſtinctions as well as temporary modes. Juſtice Shallow will for ever rank with certain ſpecies of men; he is like a well painted portrait in the dreſs of his age. Piſtol appears a mere antiquated habit, ſo uncouthly faſhioned, we can hardly believe it was made for any thing but a maſquerade frolic. The poets who mean to pleaſe poſterity, ſhould therefore work as painters, not as taylors, and give us peculiar features rather than fantaſtic habits: but where there is ſuch a prodigious variety of well drawn portraits as in this play, we may excuſe one piece of mere drapery, eſpecially when exhibited to expoſe an abſurd and troubleſome faſhion.

Mine hoſteſs Quickly is of a ſpecies not extinct. It may be ſaid, the author there ſinks from comedy to farce, but ſhe helps to compleat the character of Falſtaffe, and ſome

ſome of the dialogues in which ſhe is engaged, are diverting. Every ſcene in which Doll Tearſheet appears is indecent, and therefore not only indefenſible but inexcuſable. There are delicacies of decorum in one age unknown to another age, but whatever is immoral is equally blameable in all ages, and every approach to obſcenity is an offence for which wit cannot atone, nor the barbarity or the corruption of the times excuſe.

Having conſidered the characters of this piece, I cannot paſs over the conduct of it, without taking notice of the peculiar felicity with which the fable begins to unfold itſelf from the very beginning.

The firſt ſcenes give the outlines of the characters, and the argument of the drama. Where is there an inſtance of any opening of a play equal to this? And I think I did not raſhly aſſert, that it is one of the moſt difficult parts of the dramatic art; for that ſurely may be allowed ſo, in which the greateſt maſters have very ſeldom ſucceeded. Euripides is not very happy in this reſpect. Iphigenia in Tauris begins by telling to herſelf, in a pretty long ſoliloquy, who ſhe is, and all that

happened to her at Aulis. As Ariſtotle gives this play the higheſt praiſe, we may be aſſured it did not in any reſpect offend the Greek taſte: and Boileau not injudiciouſly prefers this ſimple expoſition, deſtitute as it is of any grace, to the perplexed and tedious declamation of the modern ſtage.

Que dès les premiers vers l'action préparée,
Sans peine, du ſujet applaniſſe l'entrée,
Je me ris d'un acteur, qui lent à s'exprimer,
De ce qu'il veut, d'abord ne ſait pas m'informer;
Et qui, debrouillant mal une pénible intrigue,
D'un divertiſſement me fait une fatigue.
J'aimerois mieux encor qu'il déclinât ſon nom,
Et dît, Je ſuis Oreſte, ou bien Agamemnon:
Que d'aller par un tas de confuſes merveilles.
Sans rien dire à l'eſprit etourdir les oreilles.

That the ſimplicity of Euripides is preferable to the perplexity or bombaſt of Corneille's manner in developing the ſtory of ſeveral of his tragedies, no perſon of juſt taſte I believe will diſpute. The firſt ſcene of the Cinna has been ridiculed by Boileau. That of Sertorius is not very happy. His famous play of Rodogune is opened by two unknown perſons, one of whom begins,

Enfin ce jour pompeux, cet heureux jour, nous luit;

and,

and, after *un tas de confuſes merveilles* in the moſt wretched verſe, extended to the length of ſeventy lines, when the reader very impatiently expects to be informed of the whole of the narration, ſtops ſhort with theſe words,

Je vous acheverai le reſte une autre fois.

Two brothers united by the moſt tender friendſhip, living in the ſame palace, having been long in love with the ſame princeſs, never have intimated their paſſion to each other, not out of a motive of jealouſy or diſtruſt, but that their confidents may tell it the ſpectator, and make him ſome amends for the abrupt concluſion of the former converſation. However, ſtill the poor ſpectator is much in the dark, till the queen, who is a perfect Machiavel, relates, merely from love of talking, all the murders ſhe has committed, and thoſe ſhe ſtill intends to commit, to her waiting-woman, for whoſe parts ſhe expreſſes at the ſame time a ſovereign contempt.

Here I cannot help taking notice, that as the poet's want of art made it neceſſary to ſet the queen to prate of her former crimes, to let us into the fable; ſo ignorance of human nature betrayed him, in a ſuc-

a ſucceeding ſcene, into the enormous abſurdity of making both Rodogune and the queen, without heſitation, the one adviſe the lover to murder his miſtreſs, the other the ſon to murder his mother. Here again an inſtance offers itſelf of our Shakeſpear's ſuperior knowledge of the heart of man. King John wiſhes to inſtigate Hubert to kill Prince Arthur, but obſerve with what difficulty he expreſſes his horrid purpoſe:

King JOHN.

Come hither, Hubert. O my gentle Hubert
We owe thee much; within this wall of fleſh
There is a ſoul counts thee her creditor,
And with advantage means to pay thy love:
And, my good friend, thy voluntary oath
Lives in this boſom, dearly cheriſhed.
Give me thy hand, I had a thing to ſay—
But I will fit it with ſome better time,
By heaven, Hubert, I'm almoſt aſhamed
To ſay what good reſpect I have of thee.

HUBERT,

I am much bounden to your majeſty.

King JOHN

Good friend, thou haſt no cauſe to ſay ſo yet—
But thou ſhalt have—and creep time ne'er ſo ſlow,
Yet it ſhall come for me to do thee good.
I had a thing to ſay—but let it go:
The ſun is in the heav'n, and the proud day,
Attended with the pleaſures of the world,
Is all too wanton, and too full of gaudes,

To

To give me audience. If the midnight bell
Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth
Sound one unto the drowſy race of night;
If this ſame were a church-yard where we ſtand,
And thou poſſeſſed with a thouſand wrongs;
Or if that ſurly ſpirit melancholy
Had bak'd thy blood and made it heavy-thick,
Which elſe runs tickling up and down the veins,
Making that idiot laughter keep mens eyes,
And ſtrain their cheeks to idle merriment;
(A paſſion hateful to my purpoſes)
Or if thou could'ſt ſee me without eyes,
Hear me without thine ears, and make reply
Without a tongue, uſing conceit alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful ſound of words;
Then, in deſpight of broad-ey'd watchful day,
I would unto thy boſom pour my thoughts:
But ah, I will not—yet I love thee well;
And by my troth, I think, thou lov'ſt me well.

ON

ON THE

PRÆTERNATURAL

BEINGS.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to ſhape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Midſummer Night's Dream.

ON THE PRÆTERNATURAL BEINGS.

AS the genius of Shakeſpear, through the whole extent of the poet's province, is the object of our enquiry, we ſhould do him great injuſtice, if we did not attend to his peculiar felicity, in thoſe fictions and inventions, from which poetry derives its higheſt diſtinction, and from whence it firſt aſſumed its pretenſions to divine inſpiration, and appeared the aſſociate of religion.

The ancient poet was admitted into the ſynod of the Gods: he diſcourſed of their natures, he repeated their counſels, and, without the charge of impiety or preſumption, diſcloſed their diſſenſions, and publiſhed their vices. He peopled the woods with nymphs, the rivers with deities; and, that he might ſtill have ſome being within call

call to his aſſiſtance, he placed reſponſive echo in the vacant regions of air.

In the infant ages of the world, the credulity of ignorance greedily received every marvellous tale: but, as mankind increaſed in knowledge, and a long ſeries of traditions had eſtabliſhed a certain mythology and hiſtory, the poet was no longer permitted to range, uncontrolled, through the boundleſs dominions of fancy, but became reſtrained in ſome meaſure, to things believed or known.——Though the duty of poetry to pleaſe and to ſurpriſe ſtill ſubſiſted, the means varied with the ſtate of the world, and it ſoon grew neceſſary to make the new inventions lean on the old traditions.—The human mind delights in novelty, and is captivated by the marvellous, But even in fable itſelf requires the credible.—The poet, who can give to ſplendid inventions, and to fictions new and bold, the air and authority of reality and truth, is maſter of the genuine ſources of the Caſtalian ſpring, and may juſtly be ſaid to draw his inſpiration from *the well-head of a pure poeſy*.

Shakeſpear ſaw how uſeful the popular ſuperſtitions had been to the ancient poets: he

he felt that they were neceſſary to poetry itſelf. One needs only to read ſome modern French heroic poems to be convinced how poorly epic poetry ſubſiſts on the pure elements of hiſtory and philoſophy: Taſſo, though he had a ſubject ſo popular, at the time he wrote, as the deliverance of Jeruſalem, was obliged to employ the operations of magic, and the interpoſition of angels and dæmons, to give the marvellous, the ſublime, and, I may add, that religious air to his work, which ennobles the enthuſiaſm, and ſanctifies the fiction of the poet. Arioſto's excurſive muſe wanders through the regions of romance, attended by all the ſuperb train of chivalry, giants, dwarfs, and enchanters, and however theſe poets, by the ſevere and frigid critics may have been condemned for giving ornaments not purely claſſical, to their works; I believe every reader of taſte admires, not only the fertility of their imagination, but the judgment with which they availed themſelves of the ſuperſtition of the times, and of the cuſtoms and modes of the country, in which they laid their ſcenes of action.

To recur, as the learned ſometimes do, to the mythology and fables of other ages, and

and other countries, has ever a poor effect: Jupiter, Minerva, and Apollo, only embelliſh a modern ſtory, as a print from their ſtatues adorns the frontiſpiece.—We admire indeed the art of the ſculptors who give their images with grace and majeſty; but no devotion is excited, no enthuſiaſm kindled, by the repreſentations of characters whoſe divinity we do not acknowledge.

When the Pagan temples ceaſed to be revered, and the Parnaſſian mount exiſted no longer, it would have been difficult for the poet of later times to have preſerved the divinity of his muſe inviolate, if the weſtern world too had not had its ſacred fables. While there is any national ſuperſtition which credulity has conſecrated, any hallowed tradition long revered by vulgar faith; to the ſanctuary, that aſylum, may the poet reſort.——Let him tread the holy ground with reverence; reſpect the eſtabliſhed doctrine; exactly obſerve the accuſtomed rites, and the attributes of the object of veneration; then ſhall he not vainly invoke an inexorable or abſent deity. Ghoſts, fairies, goblins, elves, were as propitious, were as aſſiſtant to Shakeſpear, and gave as much of the ſublime, and of the marvellous,

to

to his fictions, as nymphs, ſatyrs, fawns, and even the triple Geryon, to the works of ancient bards. Our poet never carries his præternatural beings beyond the limits of the popular tradition. It is true, that he boldly exerts his poetic genius and facinating powers in that magic circle, *in which none e'er durſt walk but he:* but as judicious as bold, he contains himſelf within it. He calls up all the ſtately phantoms in the regions of ſuperſtition, which our faith will receive with reverence. He throws into their manners and language a myſterious ſolemnity, favourable to ſuperſtition in general, with ſomething highly characteriſtic of each particular being which he exhibits. His witches, his ghoſts, and his fairies, ſeem ſpirits of health or goblins damn'd; *bring with them airs from heaven, or blaſts from hell.* His ghoſts are ſullen, melancholy, and terrible. Every ſentence, utter'd by the witches, is a prophecy or a charm; their manners are malignant, their phraſes ambiguous, their promiſes deluſive.——The witches cauldron is a horrid collection of what is moſt horrid in their ſuppoſed incantations. Ariel is a ſpirit, mild, gentle, and ſweet, poſſeſs'd of ſupernatural powers, but ſubject to the command of a great magician.

The

The fairies are ſportive and gay; the innocent artificers of harmleſs frauds, and mirthful deluſions. Puck's enumeration of the feats of a fairy is the moſt agreeable recital of their ſuppoſed gambols.

To all theſe beings our poet has aſſigned taſks, and appropriated manners adapted to their imputed diſpoſitions and characters; which are continually developing through the whole piece, in a ſeries of operations conducive to the cataſtrophe. They are not brought in as ſubordinate or caſual agents, but lead the action, and govern the fable; in which reſpect our countryman has entered more into theatrical propriety than the Greek tragedians.

Every ſpecies of poetry has its diſtinct duties and obligations. The drama does not, like the epic, admit of epiſode, ſuperfluous perſons, or things incredible; for, as it is obſerved by a critic of great ingenuity and taſte, * "that which paſſes in "repreſentation, and challenges, as it were, "the ſcrutiny of the eye, muſt be truth "itſelf, or ſomething very nearly ap"proaching to it." It ſhould indeed be what our imagination will adopt, though our

* Hurd on dramatic Imitation.

our reaſon would reject it. Great caution and dexterity are required in the dramatic poet to give an air of reality to fictitious exiſtence.

In the bold attempt to give to airy nothing a local habitation and a perſon, regard muſt be paid to fix it in ſuch ſcenes, and to diſplay it in ſuch actions, as are agreeable to the popular opinion.—— Witches holding their ſabbath, and ſaluting paſſengers on the blaſted heath; ghoſts, at the midnight hour, viſiting the glimpſes of the moon, and whiſpering a bloody ſecret, from propriety of place and action, derive a credibility very propitious to the ſcheme of the poet. *Reddere perſonæ— convenientia cuique*, cannot be leſs his duty in regard to theſe ſuperior and divine, than to human characters. Indeed, from the invariableneſs of their natures, a greater conſiſtency and uniformity is neceſſary; but moſt of all, as the belief of their intervention depends entirely on their manners and ſentiments ſuiting with the pre conceived opinion of them.

The magician Proſpero raiſing a ſtorm; witches performing infernal rites; or any other exertion of the ſuppoſed powers and qualities

qualities of the agent, were eaſily credited by the vulgar.

The genius of Shakeſpear informed him that poetic fable muſt riſe above the ſimple tale of the nurſe; therefore he adorns the beldame tradition with flowers gathered on claſſic ground, but ſtill wiſely ſuffering thoſe ſimples of her native ſoil, to which the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition of her country has attributed a magic ſpell, to be predominant. Can any thing be more poetical than Proſpero's addreſs to his attendant ſpirits before he diſmiſſes them.

PROSPERO.

Ye elves of hills, brooks, ſtanding lakes and groves,
And ye that on the ſands with printleſs foot
Do chaſe the ebbing Neptune; and do fly him
When he comes back; ye demy-puppets, that,
By the moon-ſhine, the green ſour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you, whoſe paſtime
Is to make midnight muſhrooms; that rejoice
To hear the ſolemn curfew; by whoſe aid
(Weak maſters though you be) I have bedimm'd
The noon-tide-ſun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green-ſea and the azured vault
Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder.
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's ſtout oak
With his own bolt: the ſtrong-bas'd promontory
Have I made ſhake, and by the ſpurs pluckt up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have wak'd their ſleepers; op'd, and let them forth,
By my ſo potent art.

Here

Here are agreeably ſummed up the popular ſtories concerning the power of magicians. The incantations of the witches in Macbeth are more ſolemn and terrible than thoſe of the Erichtho of Lucan, or of the Canidia of Horace. It may be ſaid, indeed, that Shakeſpear had an advantage derived from the more direful character of his national ſuperſtitions.

A celebrated writer in his ingenious letters on chivalry, has obſerved, that the Gothic manners, and Gothic ſuperſtitions, are more adapted to the uſes of poetry, than the Grecian. The devotion of thoſe times was gloomy and fearful, not being purged of the terrors of the Celtic fables. The prieſt often availed himſelf of the dire inventions of his predeceſſor, the Druid. The church of Rome adopted many of the Celtic ſuperſtitions; others, which were not eſtabliſhed by it as points of faith, ſtill maintained a traditional authority among the vulgar. Climate, temper, modes of life, and inſtitutions of government, ſeem all to have conſpired to make the ſuperſtitions of the Celtic nations melancholy and terrible. Philoſophy had not mitigated the auſterity of ignorant devotion, or tamed the fierce ſpirit of enthuſiaſm. As the bards, who were our philoſophers

and poets, pretended to be poſſeſſed of the dark ſecrets of magic and divination, they certainly encouraged the ignorant credulity, and anxious fears, to which ſuch impoſtures owe their ſucceſs and credit. The retired and gloomy ſcenes appointed for the moſt ſolemn rites of devotion; the auſterity and rigour of druidical diſcipline and juriſdiction; the faſts, the penances, the ſad excommunications from the comforts and privileges of civil life; the dreadful anathema, whoſe vengeance purſued the wretched beyond the grave which bounds all human power and moral juriſdiction muſt deeply imprint on the mind all thoſe forms of ſuperſtition ſuch an hierarchy preſented. The bard who was ſubſervient to the druid, had mixed them in his heroic ſong; in his hiſtorical annals; in his medical practice: genii aſſiſted his heroes; dæmons decided the fate of the battle; and charms cured the ſick, or the wounded. After the conſecrated groves were cut down, and the temples demoliſhed, the tales that ſprung from thence were ſtill preſerved with religious reverence in the minds of the people.

The poet found himſelf happily ſituated amidſt enchantments, ghoſts, goblins; every element ſuppoſed the reſidence of a kind

kind of deity; the genius of the mountain, the ſpirit of the floods, the oak endued with ſacred prophecy, made men walk abroad with a fearful apprehenſion.

Of powers unſeen, and mightier far than they.

On the mountains and in the woods, ſtalked the angry ſpectre; and in the gayeſt and moſt pleaſing ſcenes, even within the cheerful haunts of men, amongſt villages and farms,

Tripp'd the light fairies and the dapper elves.

The reader will eaſily perceive what reſources remained for the poet in this viſionary land of ideal forms. The general ſcenery of nature, conſidered as inanimate, only adorns the deſcriptive part of poetry; but being, according to the Celtic traditions, animated by a kind of intelligences, the bard could better make uſe of them for his moral purpoſes. That awe of the immediate preſence of the deity, which, among the reſt of the vulgar, is confined to temples and altars, was here diffuſed over every object. They paſſed trembling through the woods, and over the mountain, and by the lakes, inhabited by theſe inviſible powers; ſuch apprehenſions muſt indeed

Deepen the murmur of the falling floods,
And ſhed a browner horror on the woods;

give fearful accents to every whiſper of

the animate or inanimate creation, and arm every ſhadow with terrors.

With great reaſon, therefore it was aſſerted, that the weſtern bards had advantage over Homer in the ſuperſtitions of their country. The religious ceremonies of Greece were more pompous than ſolemn, and ſeemed as much a part of their civil inſtitutions, as belonging to ſpiritual matters: nor did they impreſs ſo deep a ſenſe of inviſible beings, and prepare the mind to catch the enthuſiaſm of the poet, and to receive with veneration the phantoms he preſented.

Our countryman has another ſuperiority over the Greek poets, even the earlieſt of them, who, having imbibed the learning of myſterious Egypt, addicted themſelves to allegory; but our Gothic bard employs the potent agency of ſacred fable, inſtead of mere amuſive allegory. When the world becomes learned and philoſophical, fable refines into allegory. But the age of fable is the golden age of poetry; when the beams of unclouded reaſon, and the ſteady lamp of inquſitive philoſophy throw their penetrating rays upon the phantoms of imagination, they diſcover them to have been mere ſhadows, formed by ignorance. The thunderbolts of

of Jove, forged in Cimmerian caves; the ceſtus of Venus, woven by hands of the attracting Graces, ceaſe to terrify and allure. Echo, from an amorous nymph, fades into voice, and nothing more; the very threads of Iris's ſcarf are untwiſted; all the poet's ſpells are broken, his charms diſſolved; deſerted on his own enchanted ground, he takes refuge in the groves of philoſophy; but there his divinities evaporate in allegory, in which myſtic and inſubſtantial ſtate they do but weakly aſſiſt his operations. By aſſociating his muſe with philoſophy, he hopes ſhe may eſtabliſh with the learned the worſhip ſhe won from the ignorant; ſo makes her quit the old traditional fable, from whence ſhe derived her firſt authority and power, to follow airy hypotheſis, and chimerical ſyſtems. Allegory, the daughter of fable, is admired by the faſtidious wit, and abſtruſe ſcholar, when her mother begins to be treated as ſuperannuated, fooliſh, and doting; but however well ſhe may pleaſe and amuſe, not being worſhipped as divine, ſhe does not awe and terrify like ſacred mythology, nor ever can eſtabliſh the ſame fearful devotion, nor aſſume ſuch arbitrary power over the mind. Her perſon is not adapted to the ſtage, nor her

qualities to the buſineſs and end of dramatic repreſentation. L'Abbé du Bos has judiciouſly diſtinguiſhed the reaſons why allegory is not fit for the drama. What the critic inveſtigated by art and ſtudy, the wiſdom of nature unfolded to our unlettered poet, or he would not have reſiſted the prevalent faſhion of his allegorizing age; eſpecially as Spencer's Fairy Queen was the admired work of the times.

Allegorical beings, performing acts of chivalry, fell in with the taſte of an age that affected abſtruſe learning, romantic valour, and high-flown gallantry. Prince Arthur, the Britiſh Hercules, was brought from ancient ballads and romances, to be allegorized into the knight of magnanimity, at the Court of Gloriana. His knights followed him thither, in the ſame moralized garb, and even the queſtynge beaſt received no leſs honour and improvement from the allegorizing art of Spencer, as has been ſhewn by a critic of great learning, ingenuity, and taſte in his obſervations on the Fairy Queen.

Our firſt theatrical entertainments, after we emerged from groſs barbariſm, were of the allegorical kind. The Chriſtmas carol,

carol, and carnival ſhews, the pious paſtimes of our holy-days, were turned into pageantries and maſques, all ſymbolical and allegorical ——Our ſtage roſe from hymns to the virgin, and encomiums on the patriarchs and ſaints: as the Grecian tragedies from the hymns to Bacchus. Our early poets added narration and action to this kind of pſalmody, as Æſchylus had done to the ſong of the goat. Much more rapid indeed was the progreſs of the Grecian ſtage towards perfection.—Philoſophy, poetry, eloquence, all the fine arts, were in their meridian glory, when the drama firſt began to dawn at Athens, and glorioufly it ſhone forth, illumined by every kind of intellectual light.

Shakeſpear, in the dark ſhades of Gothic barbariſm, had no reſources but in the very phantoms that walked the night of ignorance and ſuperſtition: or in touching the latent paſſions of civil rage and diſcord; ſure to pleaſe beſt his fierce and barbarous audience, when he raiſed the bloody ghoſt, or reared the warlike ſtandard. His choice of theſe ſubjects was judicious, if we conſider the times in which he lived; his management of them ſo

maſterly, that he will be admired in all times.

In the ſame age, Ben. Johnſon, more proud of his learning than confident of his genius, was deſirous to give a metaphyſical air to his compoſitions. He compoſed many pieces of the allegorical kind, eſtabliſhed on the Grecian mythology, and rendered his play-houſe a perfect pantheon.—Shakeſpear diſdained theſe quaint devices; an admirable judge of human nature, with a capacity moſt extenſive, and an invention moſt happy, he contented himſelf with giving dramatic manners to hiſtory, ſublimity and its appropriated powers and charms to fiction; and in both theſe arts he is unequalled.—The Cataline and Sejanus of Johnſon are cold, crude, heavy pieces; turgid where they ſhould be great; bombaſt where they ſhould be ſublime; the ſentiments extravagant; the manners exaggerated; and the whole undramatically conducted by long ſenatorial ſpeeches, and flat plagiariſms from Tacitus and Salluſt. Such of this author's pieces as he boaſts to be *grounded on antiquity and ſolid learning, and to lay hold on removed myſteries* *, have neither the majeſty

* Prologue to the Maſque of Queens.

jeſty of Shakeſpear's ſerious fables, nor the pleaſing ſportfulneſs and poetical imagination of his fairy tales. Indeed if we compare our countryman, in this reſpect, with the moſt admired writers of antiquity, we ſhall, perhaps, not find him inferior to them.—Æſchylus, with greater impetuoſity of genius than even our countryman, makes bold incurſions into the blind chaos of mingled allegory and fable, but he is not ſo happy in diffuſing the ſolemn ſhade; in caſting the dim, religious light that ſhould reign there. When he introduces his furies, and other ſupernatural beings, he expoſes them by too glaring a light; cauſes affright in the ſpectator, but never riſes to imparting that unlimited terror which we feel when Macbeth to his bold addreſs,

> How now! ye ſecret, foul, and midnight hags,
> What is't you do?

is anſwered,

> A deed without a name.

The witches of the foreſt are as important in the tragedy of Macbeth, as the Eumenides in the drama of Æſchylus; but our poet is infinitely more dexterous and judicious in the conduct of their part. The ſecret, foul, and midnight hags are not introduced into the caſtle of Macbeth;

they never appear but in their allotted region of ſolitude and night, nor act beyond their ſphere of ambiguous prophecy, and malignant ſorcery. The Eumenides, ſnoring in the temple of Apollo, and then appearing as evidence againſt Oreſtes in the Areopagus, ſeem both acting out of their ſphere, and below their character. It was the appointed office of the venerable goddeſſes, to avenge the crimes unwhipt of juſtice, not to demand the public trial of guilty men. They muſt loſe much of the fear and reverence in which they were held for their ſecret influence of the mind, and the terrors they could inflict on criminal conſcience, when they were repreſented as obliged to have recourſe to the ordinary method of revenge, by being witneſſes and pleaders in a court of juſtice, to obtain the corporal puniſhment of the offender. Indeed, it is poſſible, that the whole ſtory of this play might be allegorical, as thus, that Oreſtes, haunted by the terrors which purſue the guilty mind confeſſed his crime to the Areopagus, with all the aggravating circumſtances remorſe ſuggeſted to him, from a pious deſire to expiate his offence, by ſubmitting to whatever ſentence this reſpectable aſſembly ſhould pronounce for that purpoſe. The oracle which commanded

manded him to put Clytemneſtra to death, would plead for him with his judges: their voices being equal for abſolving or puniſhing, wiſdom gives her vote for abſolving him.

Thus conſidered, what appears ſo odd in the mouth of the goddeſs, that ſhe is little affected by the circumſtance of Clytemneſtra's relation to the murderer, becauſe ſhe herſelf had no mother, means only, that juſtice is not governed by any affection or perſonal conſideration, but acts by an invariable and general rule. If the oracle commanded, and the laws juſtified the act of Oreſtes, by appointing the next in blood to avenge the murder, then other circumſtances of a ſpecial and inferior kind, were not to have any weight. I am inclined to think this tragedy is a mixture of hiſtory and allegory. Æſchylus affected the allegorical manner ſo much as to form a tragedy, called the Ballance, upon the allegory in Homer, of Jupiter weighing the fates of Hector and Achilles*; and it is apparent, that the Prometheus of this author, is the ancient allegory of Prometheus wrought into a drama. Prometheus makes his firſt appearance with two ſymbo-

* Apud Plut. de modo. leg poetas.

ſymbolical perſons, Violence and Force, which are, apparently, of the poet's fiction. Pere Brumoy intimates a ſuſpicion that this tragedy is an allegory, but imagines it alludes to Xerxes or Darius, becauſe it abounds with reflections on tyranny. To flatter the republican ſpirit, all the Grecian tragedies are full of ſuch reflections. But an oblique cenſure on the Perſian monarch could not have excuſed the direct imputations thrown on the character of Jupiter, if the circumſtances of the ſtory had been taken in a literal ſenſe; nor can it be ſuppoſed that the Athenians would have endured the moſt violent affronts to have been offered to the character of that deity to whom they every day offered ſacrifice. An allegory being ſometimes a mere phyſical hypotheſis, without impiety might be treated with freedom.—It is probable that many allegories brought from the hieroglyphic land of Ægypt, were, in the groſſer times of Greece, literally underſtood by the vulgar; but, in more philoſophic ages, were again tranſmuted into allegory; which will account for the mythology of the Greeks and Ægyptians varying greatly, but ſtill preſerving ſuch a reſemblance as ſhews them to be derived from the ſame origin.

Jealous

Jealous of the neighbouring ſtates, and ever attentive to the glory and intereſt of their commonwealth, an Athenian audience liſtened with pleaſure to any circumſtances, in their theatrical entertainments, which reflected honour on their country. The inſtitution of the Areopagus by the expreſs command of Minerva; a perpetual amity promiſed by Oreſtes between Argos and Athens in the tragedy of the Eumenides; and a prophecy of Prometheus, which threw a luſtre on the author of the race of the Heraclidæ, were circumſtances, without queſtion, ſedulouſly ſought by the poet, and favourably received by the ſpectator. But though ſuch ſubjects might be choſen, or invented, as would introduce ſome favourable incidents, or flattering reflections, this intention did not always reign through the whole drama.

It has been juſt now obſerved, that Shakeſpear has an advantage over the Greek poets, in the more ſolemn, gloomy, and myſterious air of his national ſuperſtitions; but this avails him only with critics of deep penetration and true taſte, and with whom ſentiment has more ſway than authority. The learned have received the popular

popular tales of Greece from their poets; ours are derived to them from the illiterate vulgar. The phantom of Darius, in the tragedy of the Perſians, evoked by ancient rites, is beheld with reverence by the ſcholar, and endured by the *bel eſprit*. To theſe the ghoſt of Hamlet is an object of contempt or ridicule. Let us candidly examine theſe royal ſhades, as exhibited to us by theſe great maſters in the art of exciting pity and terror, Æſchylus and Shakeſpear; and impartially decide which poet throws moſt of the ſublime into the præternatural character; and, alſo, which has the art to render it moſt efficient in the drama. This enquiry may be more intereſting, as the French wits have often mentioned Hamlet's ghoſt as an inſtance of the barbariſm of our theatre. The Perſians, of Æſchylus, is certainly one of the moſt auguſt ſpectacles that ever was repreſented on a theatre; nobly imagined, happily ſuſtained, regularly conducted, deeply intereſting to the Athenian people, and favourable to their great ſcheme of reſiſting the power of the Perſian monarch. It would be abſurd to depriciate this excellent piece, or to bring into a general compariſon with it, a drama of ſo different a kind as the tragedy of Hamlet. But it is

ſurely

ſurely allowable to compare the Perſian phantom with the Daniſh ghoſt; and to examine, whether any thing but prejudice, in favour of the ancients, protects the ſuperſtitious circumſtances relative to the one, from the ridicule with which thoſe accompanying the other are treated. Atoſſa, the widow of Darius, relates to the ſages of the Perſian council, a dream and an omen; they adviſe her to conſult the ſhade of her dead lord, upon what is to be done in the unfortunate ſituation of Xerxes juſt defeated by the Greeks. In the third act ſhe enters offering to the Manes a libation compoſed of milk, honey, wine, oil, &c. upon this Darius iſſues from his tomb. Let the wits, who are ſo ſmart on our ghoſt's diſappearing at the cock's crowing, explain why, in reaſon, a ghoſt in Perſia, or in Greece, ſhould be more fond of milk and honey, than averſe in Denmark, to the crowing of a cock. Each poet adopted, in his work, the ſuperſtition relative to his ſubject; and the poet who does ſo, underſtands his buſineſs much better than the critic, who, in judging of that work, refuſes it his attention, The phantom of Darius comes forth in his regal robes to Atoſſa and the Satraps in council, who,

who, in the Eaſtern manner, pay their ſilent adorations to their emperor. His quality of ghoſt does not appear to make any impreſſion upon them; and the Satraps ſo exactly preſerve the characters of courtiers, that they do not venture to tell him the true ſtate of the affairs of his kingdom, and its recent diſgraces: finding he cannot get any information from them, he addreſſes himſelf to Atoſſa, who does not break forth with that paſſion and tenderneſs one ſhould ſuppoſe ſhe would do on the ſight of her long loſt huſband; but very calmly informs him, after ſome flattery on the conſtant proſperity of his reign, of the calamitous ſtate of Perſia under Xerxes, who has been ſtimulated by his courtiers to make war upon Greece. The phantom, who was to appear ignorant of what was paſt, that the Athenian ear might be ſoothed and flattered with the detail of their victory at Salamis, is allowed for the ſame reaſon, ſuch preſcience as to foretell their future triumph at Platea. Whatever elſe he adds by way of council or reproof, either in itſelf, or in the mode of delivering it, is nothing more than might be expected from any old counſellor of ſtate. Darius gives his advice to the old men, to enjoy whatever they can, be-

cauſe

cauſe riches are of no uſe in the grave. As this touches the moſt abſurd and ridiculous foible in human nature, the increaſe of a greedy and ſolicitous deſire of wealth as the period of enjoyment of it becomes more precarious and ſhort, the admonition has ſomething of a comic and ſatirical turn, unbecoming the ſolemn character of the ſpeaker, and the ſad exigency upon which he was called. The intervention of this præternatural being gives nothing of the marvelous or the ſublime to the piece, nor adds to, or is connected with its intereſt. The ſupernatural diveſted of *the auguſt and the terrible* make but a poor figure in any ſpecies of poetry; uſeleſs and unconnected with the fable, it wants propriety in dramatic poetry. Shakeſpear had ſo juſt a taſte that he never introduced any præternatural character on the ſtage that did not aſſiſt in the conduct of the drama. Indeed he had ſuch a prodigious force of talents he could make every being his fancy created ſubſervient to his deſigns. The uncouth, ungainly monſter Caliban, is ſo ſubject to his genius, as to aſſiſt in bringing things to the propoſed end and perfection. And the ſlight fairies, *weak maſters though they be*, even in their wanton gambols,

bols, and idle ſports, perform great taſks by *his ſo potent art.*

But to return to the intended compariſon between the Grecian ſhade and the Daniſh ghoſt. The firſt propriety in the conduct of this kind of machinery, ſeems to be, that the præternatural perſon be intimately connected with the fable; that he increaſe the intereſt, add to the ſolemnity of it, and that his efficiency, in bringing on the cataſtrophe, be in ſome meaſure adequate to the violence done to the ordinary courſe of things in his viſible interpoſition. Theſe are points peculiarly important in dramatic poetry, as has been before obſerved. To theſe ends it is neceſſary this being ſhould be acknowledged and revered by the national ſuperſtition, and every operation that developes the attributes, which the vulgar opinion, or nurſe's legend, taught us to aſcribe to him, will augment our pleaſure; whether we give the reins to imagination, and as ſpectators, willingly yield ourſelves up to the pleaſing deluſion, or, as critics, examine the merit of the compoſition. I hope it is not dificult to ſhew, that in all theſe capital points our author has excelled. At the ſolemn midnight hour, Horatio and Marcellus, the ſchoolfellows

ſchoolfellows of young Hamlet, come to the centinels upon guard, excited by a report that the ghoſt of their late monarch had ſome preceding nights appeared to them. Horatio, not being of the credulous vulgar, gives little credit to the ſtory, but bids Bernardo proceed in his relation.

BERNARDO.

Laſt night of all,
When yon ſame ſtar, that's weſtward from the pole,
Had made his courſe t'illume that part of heav'n,
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myſelf,
The bell then beating one———

Here enters the ghoſt, after you are thus prepared. There is ſomething ſolemn and ſublime in thus regulating the walking of the ſpirit, by the courſe of the ſtar: It intimates a connection and correſpondence between things beyond our ken, *and above the viſible diurnal ſphere*. Horatio is affected with that kind of fear which ſuch an appearance would naturally excite. He trembles, and turns pale. When the violence of the emotion ſubſides, he reflects, that probably this ſupernatural event portends ſome danger lurking in the ſtate. This ſuggeſtion gives importance to the phænomenon, and engages our attention. Horatio's relation of the king's combat with the

the Norwegian, and of the forces the young Fortinbras is aſſembling in order to attack Denmark, ſeems to point out from what quarter the apprehended peril is to ariſe. Such appearances, ſays he, preceded the fall of mighty Julius, and the ruin of the great commonwealth; and he adds, ſuch have often been the omens of diſaſters in our own ſtate. There is great art in this conduct. The true cauſe of the royal Dane's diſcontent could not be gueſſed at: it was a ſecret which could be only revealed by himſelf. In the mean time, it was neceſſary to captivate our attention, by demonſtrating, that the poet was not going to exhibit ſuch idle and frivolous gambols as ghoſts are by the vulgar often repreſented to perform. The hiſtorical teſtimony, that, antecedent to the death of Cæſar,

> The graves ſtood tenantleſs, and the ſheeted dead
> Did ſqueak and gibber in the Roman ſtreets.

gives credibility and importance to this phænomenon. Horatio's addreſs to the ghoſt is brief and pertinent, and the whole purport of it agreeable to the vulgar conceptions of theſe matters.

HORATIO.

Stay, illuſion!
If thou haſt any ſound, or uſe of voice,
Speak to me.

If

If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do eaſe, and grace to me,
Speak to me
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
Oh ſpeak!
Or, if thou haſt uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treaſure in the womb of earth,
For which they ſay, you ſpirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it.

Its vaniſhing at the crowing of the cock is another circumſtance of the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition.

Young Hamlet's indignation at his mother's haſty and inceſtuous marriage, his ſorrow for his father's death, his character of that prince, prepare the ſpectator to ſympathize with his wrongs and ſufferings. The ſon, as is natural, with much more vehement emotion than Horatio did, addreſſes his fathers ſhade. Hamlet's terror, his aſtoniſhment, his vehement deſire to know the cauſe of this viſitation, are irreſiſtibly communicated to the ſpectator by the following ſpeech.

HAMLET.

Angels and miniſters of grace defend us!
Be thou a ſpirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blaſts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,

Thou

Thou com'ſt in ſuch a queſtionable ſhape,
That I will ſpeak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane: oh! anſwer me;
Let me not burſt in ignorance; but tell,
Why thy canonized bones, hearſed in death,
Have burſt their cearments? Why the ſepulchre,
Wherein we ſaw thee quietly in-urn'd,
Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,
To caſt thee up again? What may this mean,
That thou, dead corſe, again, in compleat ſteel,
Reviſit'ſt thus the glimpſes of the moon,
Making night hideous!

Never did the Grecian muſe of tragedy relate a tale ſo full of pity and terror as is imparted by the ghoſt. Every circumſtance melts us with compaſſion; and with what horror do we hear him ſay!

GHOST.
But that I am forbid
To tell the ſecrets of my priſon-houſe,
I could a tale unfold; whoſe lighteſt word
Would harrow up thy ſoul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like ſtars, ſtart from their ſpheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to ſtand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine:
But this eternal blazon muſt not be
To ears of fleſh and blood.

All that follows is ſolemn, ſad, and deeply affecting.

Whatever

Whatever in Hamlet belongs to the præternatural is perfectly fine; the reſt of the play does not come within the ſubject of this chapter.

The ingenious criticiſm on the play of the Tempeſt, publiſhed in the Adventurer, has made it unneceſſary to enlarge on that admirable piece, which alone would prove our author to have had a fertile, a ſublime, and original genius.

THE

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

THE

TRAGEDY

OF

MACBETH.

THIS piece is perhaps one of the greateſt exertions of the tragic and poetic powers, that any age or any country has produced. Here are opened new ſources of terror, new creations of fancy. The agency of witches and ſpirits excites a ſpecies of terror, that cannot be effected by the operation of human agency, or by any form or diſpoſition of human things. For the known limits of their powers and capacities, ſet certain bounds to our apprehenſions; myſterious horrors, undefined terrors, are raiſed by the intervention of beings whoſe nature we do not underſtand, whoſe actions we cannot controul,

and whoſe influence we know not how to eſcape. Here we feel through all the faculties of the ſoul, and to the utmoſt extent of her capacity. The apprehenſion of the interpoſition of ſuch agents, is the moſt ſalutary of all fears. It keeps up in our minds a ſenſe of our connection with awful and inviſible ſpirits, to whom our moſt ſecret actions are apparent, and from whoſe chaſtiſement innocence alone can defend us. From many dangers power will protect; many crimes may be concealed by art and hypocriſy; but when ſupernatural beings ariſe, to reveal, and to revenge, guilt bluſhes through her maſk, and trembles behind her bulwarks.

Shakeſpear has been ſufficiently juſtified by the beſt critics, for availing himſelf of the popular faith in witchcraft; and he is certainly as defenſible in this point, as Euripides and other Greek tragedians, for introducing Jupiter, Diana, Minerva, &c. whoſe perſonal intervention, in the events exhibited on the ſtage, had not obtained more credit with the thinking and philoſophical part of their ſpectators than tales of witchcraft had done among the wiſe and learned here. Much later than the age in which Macbeth lived, even in Shake-

Shakeſpear's own time, there were ſevere ſtatutes extant againſt witchcraft.

Some objections have been made to the Hecate of the Greeks, being joined to the witches of our country.

Milton, a more correct writer, has often mixed the Pagan deities even with the moſt ſacred characters of our religion. Our witches power was ſuppoſed to be exerted only in little and low miſchief: this therefore being the only inſtance where their interpoſition is recorded in the revolutions of a kingdom, the poet thought, perhaps that the ſtory would paſs off better, with the learned at leaſt, if he added the celebrated Hecate to the weird ſiſters; and ſhe is introduced, chiding their preſumption, for trading in prophecies and affairs of death. The dexterity is admirable with which the predictions of the witches (as Macbeth obſerves) prove true to the ear, but falſe to the hope, according to the general condition of vain oracles. With great judgment the poet has given to Macbeth the very temper to be wrought upon by ſuch ſuggeſtion. The bad man is his own tempter. Richard III. had a heart that prompted him to do

all that the worſt demon could have ſuggeſted, ſo that the witches had been only an idle wonder in this ſtory; nor did he want ſuch a counſellor as Lady Macbeth; a ready inſtrument like Buckingham, to adopt his projects, and execute his orders, was ſufficient. But Macbeth, of a generous diſpoſition, and good propenſities, but with vehement paſſions and aſpiring wiſhes, was a ſubject liable to be ſeduced by ſplendid proſpects, and ambitious counſels. This appears from the following character given of him by his wife:

> Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o'th' milk of human kindneſs
> To catch the neareſt way. Thou wouldſt be great;
> Art not without ambition; but without
> The illneſs ſhould attend it. What thou wouldſt highly,
> That wouldſt thou holily; wouldſt not play falſe,
> And yet wouldſt wrongly win.

So much inherent ambition in a character, without other vice, and full of the milk of human kindneſs, though obnoxious to temptation, yet would have great ſtruggles before it yielded, and as violent fits of ſubſequent remorſe.

If the mind is to be medicated by the operations of pity and terror, ſurely no means

means are ſo well adapted to that end, as a ſtrong and lively repreſentation of the agonizing ſtruggles that precede, and the terrible horrors that follow wicked actions. Other poets thought they had ſufficiently attended to the moral purpoſe of the drama, in making the furies purſue the perpetrated crime. Our author waves their bloody daggers in the road to guilt, and demonſtrates, that as ſoon as a man begins to hearken to ill ſuggeſtions, terrors environ, and fears diſtract him. Tenderneſs and conjugal love combat in the breaſts of a Medea and a Herod in their purpoſed vengeance. Perſonal affection often weeps on the theatre, while jealouſy or revenge whet the bloody knife; but Macbeth's emotions are the ſtruggles of conſcience; his agonies are the agonies of remorſe. They are leſſons of juſtice, and warnings to innocence. I do not know that any dramatic writer, except Shakeſpear, has ſet forth the pangs of guilt ſeparate from the fear of puniſhment. Clytemneſtra is repreſented by Euripides as under great terrors, on account of the murder of Agamemnon; but they ariſe from fear, not repentance. It is not the memory of the aſſaſſinated huſband which haunts and terrifies her, but an apprehen-

ſion of vengeance from his ſurviving ſon: when ſhe is told Oreſtes is dead, her mind is again at eaſe. It muſt be allowed, that on the Grecian ſtage, it is the office of the chorus to moralize, and to point out, on every occaſion, the advantages of virtue over vice.—But how much leſs affecting are their animadverſions than the teſtimony of the perſon concerned! Whatever belongs to the part of the chorus has hardly the force of dramatic imitation. The chorus is in a manner without perſonal character or intereſt, and no way an agent in the drama. We cannot ſympathize with the cool reflections of theſe idle ſpectators, as we do with the ſentiments of the perſons in whoſe circumſtances and ſituation we are intereſted.

The heart of man, like iron and other metal, is hard, and of firm reſiſtance, when cold, but, warmed, it becomes malleable and ductile. It is by touching the paſſions and exciting ſympathetic emotions, not by ſentences, that the tragedian muſt make his impreſſions on the ſpectator. I will appeal to any perſon of taſte, whether the following ſpeeches of Wolſey, in another play of Shakeſpear, the firſt a ſoliloquy, the ſecond addreſſed to his ſervant

vant Cromwell, in which he gives the teſtimony of his experience, and the reſult of his own feelings, would make the ſame impreſſion, if uttered by a ſet of ſpeculative ſages in the epiſode of a chorus.

WOLSEY.

So farewell to the little good you bear me!
Farewell, a long farewell to my greatneſs!
This is the ſtate of man; to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hopes, to-morrow bloſſoms,
And bears his bluſhing honours thick upon him,
The third day comes a froſt, a killing froſt,
And when he thinks, good eaſy man, full ſurely
His greatneſs is a ripening, nips his root;
And then he falls, as I do. I have ventur'd,
Like little wanton boys, that ſwim on bladders,
Theſe many ſummers in a ſea of glory,
But far beyond my depth; my high-blown pride
At length broke under me, and now has left me,
Weary and old with ſervice, to the mercy
Of a rude ſtream, that muſt for ever hide me.
Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye;
I feel my heart new open'd. Oh, how wretched
Is that poor man, that hangs on princes' favours!
There is, betwixt the ſmile we would aſpire to,
That ſweet aſpect of princes, and our ruin,
More pangs and fears than war or women have:
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.

And in another place,

Let's dry our eyes, and thus far hear me, Cromwell;
And when I am forgotten, as I ſhall be,
And ſleep in dull cold marble, where no mention

Of me muſt more be heard, ſay then, I taught thee,
Say, Wolſey, that once trod the ways of glory,
And ſounded all the depths and ſhoals of honour,
Found thee a way, out of his wreck, to riſe in;
A ſure and ſafe one, though thy maſter miſs'd it.
Mark but my fall, and that which ruin'd me;
Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition,
By that ſin fell the angels; how can man then,
The image of his maker, hope to win by't?
Love thyſelf laſt; cheriſh thoſe hearts that hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honeſty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To ſilence envious tongues, be juſt, and fear not.
Let all the ends thou aim'ſt at, be thy country's,
Thy god's, and truth's; then if thou fall'ſt, O Cromwell,
Thou fall'ſt a bleſſed martyr. Serve the king;
And—pr'ythee, lead me in;
There take an inventory of all I have,
To the laſt penny, 'tis the king's. My robe,
And my integrity to heav'n, is all
I dare now call mine own. O Cromwell, Cromwell,
Had I but ſerv'd my God with half the zeal
I ſerv'd my king, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies.

I ſelected theſe two paſſages as containing reflections of ſuch a general kind, as might be with leaſt impropriety tranſferred to the chorus; but if even theſe would loſe much of their force and pathos if not ſpoken by the fallen ſtateſman, how much

much more would thoſe do, which are the expreſſions of ſome inſtantaneous emotion, occaſioned by the peculiar ſituation of the perſon by whom they are uttered! The ſelf-condemnation of a murderer makes a very deep impreſſion upon us when we are told by Macbeth himſelf that hearing, while he was killing Duncan, one of the grooms cry God bleſs us, and Amen the other, he durſt not ſay, Amen. Had a formal chorus obſerved that a man in ſuch a guilty moment durſt not implore that mercy of which he ſtood moſt in need, it would have had but a ſlight effect. All know the deteſtation with which virtuous men behold a bad action. A much more ſalutary admonition is given when we are ſhewn the terrors that are combined with guilt in the breaſt of the offender.

Our author has ſo tempered the conſtitutional character of Macbeth, by infuſing into it the milk of human kindneſs, and a ſtrong tincture of honour, as to make the moſt violent perturbation, and pungent remorſe, naturally attend on thoſe ſteps to which he is led by the force of temptation. Here we muſt commend the poet's judgment, and his invariable attention to conſiſtency of character; but more amazing

is

is the art with which he exhibits the movement of the human mind, and renders audible the ſilent march of thought: traces its modes of operation in the courſe of deliberating, the pauſes of heſitation, and the final act of deciſion: ſhews how reaſon checks, and how the paſſions impel; and diſplays to us the trepidations that precede, and the horrors that purſue acts of blood. No ſpecies of dialogue but that which a man holds with himſelf, could effect this. The ſoliloquy has been permitted to all dramatic writers; but its true uſe has been underſtood only by our author, who alone has attained to a juſt imitation of nature in this kind of ſelf-conference.

It is certain men do not tell themſelves who they are, and whence they came; they neither narrate nor declaim in the ſolitude of the cloſet, as Greek and French writers repreſent. Here then is added to the drama, an imitation of the moſt difficult and delicate kind, that of repreſenting the internal proceſs of the mind in reaſoning and reflecting; and it is not only a difficult, but very uſeful art, as it beſt aſſiſts the poet to expoſe the anguiſh of remorſe, to repeat every whiſper of the internal

internal monitor, conſcience, and, upon occaſion, to lend her a voice *to amaze the guilty and appal the free.* As a man is averſe to expoſe his crimes, and diſcover the turpitude of his actions, even to the faithful friend and truſty confident, it is more natural for him to breathe in ſoliloquy the dark and heavy ſecrets of the ſoul, than to utter them to the moſt intimate aſſociate. The conflicts in the boſom of Macbeth, before he committed the murder, could not, by any other means, have been ſo well expoſed. He entertains the prophecy of his future greatneſs with complacency, but the very idea of the means by which he is to attain it ſhocks him to the higheſt degree.

> This ſupernatural ſolliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it giv'n me the earneſt of ſucceſs,
> Commencing in a truth? I'm Thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that ſuggeſtion,
> Whoſe horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my ſeated heart knock at my ribs
> Againſt the uſe of nature?

There is an obſcurity and ſtiffneſs in part of theſe ſoliloquies, which I wiſh I could charge entirely to the confuſion of Macbeth's mind, from the horror he feels at the thought of the murder; but our author is too much addicted to the obſcure bom-

bombaſt, much affected by all ſorts of writers in that age. The abhorrence Macbeth feels at the ſuggeſtion of aſſaſſinating his king, brings him back to this determination,

> If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
> Without my ſtir.

After a pauſe, in which we may ſuppoſe the ambitious deſire of a crown to return, ſo far as to make him undetermined what he ſhall do, and leave the deciſion to future time and unborn events, he concludes,

> Come what come may,
> Time and the hour runs thro' the rougheſt day.

By which, I confeſs, I do not with his two laſt commentators imagine is meant either the tautology of time and the hour, or an alluſion to time painted with an hour-glaſs, or an exhortation to time to haſten forward, but rather to ſay *tempus & hora*, time and occaſion, will carry the thing through, and bring it to ſome determined point and end, let its nature be what it will. In the next ſoliloquy he agitates this great queſtion concerning the propoſed murder. One argument againſt it, is, that ſuch deeds muſt be ſupported by others of like nature.

But,

But, in theſe caſes,
We ſtill have judgment here ; that we but teach
Bloody inſtructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor ; this even-handed juſtice
Commends th' ingredients of our poiſon'd chalice
To our own lips

He proceeds next to conſider the peculiar relations in which he ſtands to Duncan.

He's here in double truſt :
Firſt, as I am his kinſman and his ſubject,
Strong both againſt the deed ; then, as his hoſt,
Who ſhould againſt his murd'rer ſhut the door ;
Not bear the knife myſelf.

Then follow his arguments againſt the deed, from the admirable qualities of the king.

Beſides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties ſo meekly, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead, like angels, trumpet-tongu'd again
The deep damnation of his taking off.

So, ſays he, with many reaſons to diſſuade, I have none to urge me to this act, but a vaulting ambition ; which by a daring leap, often procures itſelf a fall. And thus having determined, he tells Lady Macbeth,

We will proceed no further in this buſineſs.
He hath honour'd me of late ; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all ſorts of people,
Which would be worn, now in their neweſt gloſs,
Not caſt aſide ſo ſoon.

Mac-

Macbeth, in debating with himſelf, chiefly dwells upon the guilt, and touches ſomething on the danger of aſſaſſinating the king. When he argues with Lady Macbeth, knowing her too wicked to be affected by the one, and too daring to be deterred by the other, he urges, with great propriety, what he thinks may have more weight with one of her diſpoſition; the favour he is in with the king, and the eſteem he has lately acquired of the people. In anſwer to her charge of cowardice, he finely diſtinguiſhes between manly courage and brutal ferocity.

MACBETH.

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more, is none.

At length, overcome, rather than perſuaded, he determines on the bloody deed.

I am ſettled, and bend up
Each corp'ral agent to this terrible feat

How terrible to him, how repugnant to his nature, we plainly perceive, when, even in the moment that he ſummons up the reſolution needful to perform it, horrid phantaſms preſent themſelves; murder alarmed by his centinel; the wolf ſtealing towards his deſign; witchcraft celebrating pale Hecate's offerings; the mid-

midnight raviſher invading ſleeping innocence, ſeem his aſſociates; and bloody daggers lead him to the very chamber of the king. At his return from thence, his ſenſe of the crime he has committed, appears ſuitable to the repugnance he had to undertake it. He tells Lady Macbeth, that, of the grooms who ſlept in Duncan's chamber,

MACBETH.

There's one did laugh in's ſleep, and one cry'd Murder!
They wak'd each other; and I ſtood and heard them;
But they did ſay their prayers, and addreſs them
Again to ſleep.

LADY.

There are two lodg'd together.

MACBETH.

One cry'd, God bleſs us! and, Amen! the other!
As they had ſeen me with theſe hangman's hands.
Liſtening their fear, I could not ſay, Amen!
When they did ſay, God bleſs us!

LADY.

Conſider it not ſo deeply.

MACBETH.

But wherefore could I not pronounce, Amen?
I had moſt need of bleſſing, and Amen
Stuck in my throat.

MACBETH.

Methought, I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!
Macbeth doth murder ſleep; the innocent ſleep.

Then

Then he replies, when his lady bids him carry back the daggers;

MACBETH.

I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

How natural is the exclamation of a perſon, who, from the fearleſs ſtate of unſuſpecting innocence, is fallen into the ſuſpicious condition of guilt, when, upon hearing a knocking at the gate, he cries out,

MACBETH.

How is it with me, when every noiſe appals me?

The poet has contrived to throw a tincture of remorſe even into Macbeth's reſolution to murder Banquo.—He does not proceed in it like a man, who, impenitent in crimes, and wanton in ſucceſs, gaily goes forward in his violent career; but ſeems impelled on, and ſtimulated to this additional villainy, by an apprehenſion, that, if Banquo's poſterity ſhould inherit the crown, he has ſacrificed his virtue, and defiled his own ſoul in vain.

MACBETH.

If 'tis ſo,
For Banquo's iſſue have I 'filed my mind,
For them, the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;

Put

Put rancours in the veſſel of my peace
Only for them ; and my eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the ſeed of Banquo kings

His deſire to keep Lady Macbeth innocent of his intended murder, and yet from the fullneſs of a throbbing heart, uttering what may render ſuſpected the very thing he wiſhes to conceal, ſhews how deeply the author enters into human nature in general, and in every circumſtance preſerves the conſiſtency of the character he exhibits.

How ſtrongly is expreſſed the great truth, that to a man of courage, the moſt terrible object is the perſon he has injured, in the following addreſs to Banquo's ghoſt :

MACBETH:

What man dare, I dare.
Approach thou like the rugged Ruſſian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or Hyrcan tyger,
Take any ſhape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble ; or, be alive again,
And dare me to the deſart with thy ſword ;
If trembling I evade it, then proteſt me
The baby of a girl. Hence, terrible ſhadow !
Unreal mock'ry hence !

It is impoſſible not to ſympathize with the terrors

terrors Macbeth expreſſes in his diſordered ſpeech.

MACBETH.

It will have blood——They ſay, blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move, and trees to ſpeak;
Augurs, that underſtand relations, have,
By magpies, and by coughs, and rooks, brought forth
The ſcret'ſt man of blood.

The perturbation with which Macbeth again reſorts to the witches, and the tone of reſentment and abhorrence with which he addreſſes them, rather expreſſes his ſenſe of the crimes to which their promiſes excited him, than any ſatisfaction in the regal condition thoſe crimes had procured.

MACBETH.

How now you ſecret, black, and midnight hags!
What is't you do?

The unhappy and diſconſolate ſtate of the moſt triumphant villainy, from a conſciouſneſs of the internal deteſtation of mankind to that flagitious greatneſs to which they are forced to pay external homage is finely expreſſed in the following words:

MACBETH.

MACBETH.

I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the ſear, the yellow leaf:
And that which ſhould accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I muſt not look to have; but in their ſtead,
Curſes the loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

Towards the concluſion of the piece his mind ſeems to ſink under its load of guilt! Deſpair and Melancholy hang on his words! We ſee his griefs that preſs harder on him than his enemies, by his addreſs to the phyſician:

MACBETH.

Can'ſt thou not miniſter to a mind diſeas'd;
Pluck from the memory a rooted ſorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And with ſome ſweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanſe the ſtuff'd boſom of that perilous ſtuff
Which weighs up the heart?

The alacrity with which he attacks young Siward, and his reluctance to engage with Macduff, of whoſe blood he ſays he has already had too much, compleat a character which is uniformly preſerved from the opening of the fable, to its concluſion.—We find him ever anſwering to the firſt idea we were made to conceive of him.

The

The man of honour pierces through the traytor and the aſſaſſin. His mind loſes its tranquillity by guilt, but never its fortitude in danger. His crimes preſented to him, even in the unreal mockery of a viſion, or the harmleſs form of ſleeping innocence, terrify him more than all his foes in arms.—It has been very juſtly obſerved by a late commentator, that this piece does not abound with thoſe nice diſcriminations of character, uſual in the plays of our author, the events being too great to admit the influence of particular diſpoſitions. It appears to me, that the character of Macbeth was alſo repreſented leſs particular and ſpecial, that his example might be of more univerſal utility. He has therefore placed him on that line on which the major part of mankind may be ranked, juſt between the extremes of good and bad; a ſtation aſſailable by various temptations, and which ſtands in the need of the guard of cautionary admonition. The ſupernatural agents, in ſome meaſure take off our attention from the other characters, eſpecially as they are, throughout the piece, what they have a right to be, predominant in the events. They ſhould not interfere but to weave the fatal web, or to unravel it; they

they ought ever to be the regents of the fable and artificers of the cataſtrophe, as the witches are in this piece. To preſerve in Macbeth a juſt conſiſtency of character; to repreſent that character naturally ſuſceptible of thoſe deſires that were to be communicated to it; to render it intereſting to the ſpectator by ſome amiable qualities; to make it exemplify the dangers of ambition, and the terrors of remorſe; was all that could be required of the tragedian and the moraliſt. With all the powers of poetry he elevates a legendary tale, without carrying it beyond the limits of vulgar faith and tradition. The ſolemn character of the infernal rites would be very ſtriking, if the ſcene was not made ludicrous by a mob of old women, which the players have added to the three weird ſiſters.—The incantation is ſo conſonant to the doctrine of enchantments, and receives ſuch power by the help of thoſe potent miniſters of direful ſuperſtition, the terrible and the miſterious, that it has not the air of poetical fiction ſo much as of a diſcovery of magical ſecrets; and thus it ſeizes the heart of the ignorant, and communicates an irreſiſtible horror to the imagination of even the more informed ſpectator.

Shakeſpear

Shakeſpear was too well read in human nature, not to know, that, though reaſon may expel the ſuperſtitions of the nurſery, the imagination does not ſo entirely free itſelf from their dominion, as not to re-admit them, if occaſion repreſents them, in the very ſhape in which they were once revered. The firſt ſcene in which the witches appear, is not ſo happily executed as the others. He has too exactly followed the vulgar reports of the Lapland witches, of whom our ſailors uſed to imagine they could purchaſe a fair wind.

The choice of a ſtory, that at once corroborated King James's doctrine of dæmonology, and ſhewed the long deſtination of his family to the throne of Great Britain, was not leſs polite flattery to his majeſty, than Virgil uſes to Auguſtus and to the Roman people, in making Anchiſes ſhew to Æneas the repreſentation of unborn heroes, that were to adorn his line, and augment the glory of their commonwealth. It is reported, that a french wit often laughs at the tragedy of Macbeth for having a legion of ghoſts in it. One ſhould imagine he either had not learnt Engliſh, or had forgot his Latin; for the ſpirits

ſpirits of Banquo's line are no more ghoſts than the repreſentations of the Julian race in the Æneid; and there is no ghoſt but Banquo's in the whole play. Euripides, in the moſt philoſophic and polite age of the Athenians, brings the ſhade of Polydorus, Priam's ſon, upon the ſtage, to tell a very long and lamentable tale. Here is therefore produced, by each tragedian, the departed ſpirit walking this upper world for cauſes admitted by popular faith. Among the ancients, the unburied, and with us the murdered, were ſuppoſed to do ſo. The apparitions are therefore equally juſtifiable or blamable; ſo the laurel crown muſt be adjudged to the poet who throws moſt of the ſublime and the marvellous into the ſupernatural agent; beſt preſerves the credibility of its intervention, and renders it moſt uſeful in the drama. There ſurely can be no diſpute of the ſuperiority of our countryman in theſe articles. There are many bombaſt ſpeeches in the tragedy of Macbeth; and theſe are the lawful prize of the critic: but envy, not content to nibble at faults, ſtrikes at its true object, the prime excellencies and perfections of the thing it would depreciate. One ſhould not wonder if a ſchoolboy critic, who neither knows what were

the ſuperſtitions of former times, or the poet's privileges in all times, ſhould flouriſh away, with all the raſh dexterity of wit, upon the appearance of a ghoſt; but it is ſtrange a man of univerſal learning, a real and juſt connoiſſeur, and a true genius, ſhould cite, as improper and abſurd, what has been practiſed by the moſt celebrated artiſts in the dramatic way, when ſuch machinery was authoriſed by the belief of the people. Is there not reaſon to ſuſpect from ſuch uncandid treatment of our poet by this critic, that he

> Views him with jealous, yet with ſcornful eyes,
> And hates for arts that caus'd himſelf to riſe?

The difference between a mind naturally prone to evil, and a frail one warped by force of temptations, is delicately diſtinguiſhed in Macbeth and his wife. There are alſo ſome touches of the pencil that mark the male and female character. When they deliberate on the murder of the king, the duties of hoſt and ſubject ſtrongly plead with him againſt the deed. She paſſes over theſe conſiderations; goes to Duncan's chamber reſolved to kill him, but could not do it, becauſe, ſhe ſays, he reſembled her father while he ſlept. There is ſomething feminine in this, and perfectly agreeable

able to the nature of the ſex; who, even when void of principle, are ſeldom entirely diveſted of ſentiment; and thus the poet, who, to uſe his own phraſe, had overſtepped the modeſty of nature in the exaggerated fierceneſs of her character, returns back to the line and limits of humanity, and that very judiciouſly, by a ſudden impreſſion, which has only an inſtantaneous effect. Thus ſhe may relapſe into her former wickedneſs, and, from the ſame ſuſceptibility, by the force of other impreſſions, be afterwards driven to diſtraction. As her character was not compoſed of thoſe gentle elements out of which regular repentance could be formed, it was well judged to throw her mind into the chaos of madneſs; and, as ſhe had exhibited wickedneſs in its higheſt degree of ferocity and atrociouſneſs, ſhe ſhould be an example of the wildeſt agonies of remorſe. As Shakeſpear could moſt exactly delineate the human mind in its regular ſtate of reaſon, ſo no one ever ſo happily caught its varying forms in the wanderings of delirium.

The ſcene in which Macduff is informed of the murder of his wife and children, is ſo celebrated, that it is not neceſſary to

enlarge upon its merit. We feel there, how much a juſt imitation of natural ſentiments on ſuch a tender occaſion, is more pathetic than choſen terms and ſtudied phraſes. As in the foregoing chapter I have made ſome obſervations on our author's management of the Præternatural Beings, I forbear to enlarge further on the ſubject of the witches: that he has kept cloſely to the traditions concerning them, is very fully ſet forth in the notes of a learned commentator on his works.

This piece may certainly be deemed one of the beſt of Shakeſpear's compoſitions, and, though it contains ſome faulty ſpeeches, and one whole ſcene entirely abſurd and improper, which art might have corrected or lopped away; yet genius, powerful genius only, (wild nature's vigour working at the root!) could have produced ſuch ſtrong and original beauties, and adapted both to the general temper and taſte of the age in which it appeared.

UPON

UPON THE

CINNA

OF

CORNEILLE.

UPON THE

CINNA

OF

CORNEILLE.

THOUGH it is an agreeable taſk, upon the whole, to attempt the vindication of injured fame, the pleaſure is much allayed by its being combined with a neceſſity to lay open the unfairneſs and errors in the proceedings of which we complain. To defend is pleaſant, to accuſe is painful; but we muſt prove the injuſtice of the ſentence, before we can demand to have it repealed. The editor of the late edition of Corneille's works, has given the following preface to the tragedy of Cinna: "Having often heard Corneille "and Shakeſpear compared, I thought it "proper to ſhew their different manner

" in ſubjects that have a reſemblance. I " have therefore choſen the firſt acts of " the Death of Cæſar, where there is a " conſpiracy, as in Cinna, and in which " every thing is relative to the conſpiracy " to the end of the third act. The rea- " der may compare the thoughts, the " ſtyle, and the judgment of Shakeſpear, " with the thoughts, the ſtyle, and the " judgment of Corneille. It belongs to " the readers of all nations to pronounce " between the one and the other. A " Frenchman or an Engliſhman might per- " haps be ſuſpected of ſome partiality. " To inſtitute this proceſs, it was neceſſary " to make an exact tranſlation; what was " proſe in the tragedy of Shakeſpear is " rendered into proſe; what was in blank " verſe into blank verſe, and almoſt verſe " by verſe; what is low and familiar is " tranſlated familiarly and low. The " tranſlator has endeavoured to riſe with " the author when he riſes; and when he " is turgid and bombaſt, not to be more " or leſs ſo than he. The tranſlation given " here is the moſt faithful that can be, " and the the only faithful one in our lan- " guage of any author ancient or modern. " I have but a word to add, which is, that " blank verſe coſts nothing but the trou-

" ble

" ble of dictating; it is not more difficult
" to write than a letter. If people ſhould
" take it into their heads to write trage-
" dies in blank verſe, and to act them on
" our theatre, tragedy is ruined; take
" away the difficulty and you take away
" the merit."

An Engliſh reader will hardly forbear ſmiling at this bold aſſertion concerning the facility of writing blank verſe. It is indeed no hard matter to write bad verſe of any kind; but, as ſo few of our poets have attained to that perfection in it which Shakeſpear and Milton have done, we have reaſon to ſuppoſe the art to be difficult. Whatever is well done in poetry or eloquence appears eaſy to do. Theatrical dialogue being an imitation of diſcourſe, our critics do not require the appearance of effort and labour, but, on the contrary, the language of nature, and a juſt reſemblance to the thing imitated. Poſſibly there is as much of difficulty in blank verſe to the poet, as there appears of eaſe in it to the reader. Like the ceſtus of Venus, formed by the happy ſkill of the Graces, it beſt exerts its charms while the artifice of the texture is partly concealed. Dryden, who brought the art of rhyme to

great excellence, endeavoured to introduce it on our ſtage; but nature and taſte revolted againſt an imitation of dialogue in a mode ſo entirely different from that in which men diſcourſe. The verſe Mr. de Voltaire thus condemns is perhaps not leſs happily adapted than the Iambic to the dramatic offices. It riſes gracefully into the ſublime; it can ſlide happily into the familiar; haſten its career if impelled by vehemence of paſſion; pauſe in the heſitation of doubt; appear lingering and languid in dejection and ſorrow; is capable of varying its accent, and adapting its harmony, to the ſentiment it ſhould convey, and the paſſion it would excite, with all the power of muſical expreſſion. Even a perſon who did not underſtand our language would find himſelf very differently affected by the following ſpeeches in that metre:

LEAR.

Vengeance! plague! death! confuſion!——
Fiery? what fiery quality? why, Glo'ſter,
I'd ſpeak with the Duke of Cornwall, and his wife:
The king would ſpeak with Cornwall. The dear father
Would with his daughter ſpeak, commands her ſervice:
Are they inform'd of this? my breath and blood!
Fiery? the fiery duke? tell the hot duke that—

MACBETH.

MACBETH.

I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the ſear, the yellow leaf:
And that which ſhould accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.
I muſt not look to have; but in their ſtead,
Curſes not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dares not.

The charm ariſing from the tones of Engliſh blank verſe cannot be felt by a foreigner, who is ſo far from being acquainted with the pronunciation of our language, that he often miſtakes the ſignification of the moſt common words; of which there are many remarkable inſtances in this boaſted tranſlation of Julius Cæſar; for he does not know that the word courſe ſignifies method of proceeding, but imagines it means a courſe of diſhes, or a race. Brutus replies to Caſſius's propoſal to kill Cæſar?

BRUTUS.

Our courſe will ſeem too bloody, Caius Caſſius,
To cut the head off, and then hack the limbs,
Like wrath in death, and envy afterwards:
For Antony is but a limb of Cæſar.

Thus it is tranſlated by Mr. de Voltaire.

BRUTUS.

Cette courſe aux Romains paraitrait trop ſanglante;

On

On nous reprocherait la colère & l' envie,
Si nous coupons la tête, & puis hachons les membres,
Car Antoine n'eſt rien qu'un membre de Cæſar.

The following ingenious note is added by the tranſlator. The word courſe, ſays he, perhaps has an alluſion to the Lupercal courſe. It alſo ſignifies a ſervice of diſhes at table. It is very extraordinary that a man ſhould ſet up for a tranſlator, with ſo little acquaintance in the language as not to be able to diſtinguiſh whether a a word in a certain period ſignifies a race, a ſervice of diſhes, or a mode of conduct. In a piece entitled Guillaume de Vade, and attributed to Mr. de Voltaire, there is a blunder of the ſame kind. Polonius orders his daughter not to confide in the promiſes of Hamlet, who, being heir to the crown, cannot have liberty of choice in marriage like a private perſon. He muſt not, ſays the old ſtateſman, carve for himſelf as vulgar perſons do. The French author tranſlates it, he muſt not cut his own victuals; and runs on about morſels, as if Hamlet's dinner, not his marriage, had been the ſubject of debate. The tranſlator knew not that the word carve is often uſed metaphorically in our language for a perſon's

perſon's framing or faſhioning his lot or portion. We ſay, the lover feeds on hope; the warrior thirſts for glory: would it be fair to tranſlate that the lover eats a morſel of hope, and the warrior deſires to drink a draught of glory? If ſuch tranſlations are allowed, the works of the moſt correct author may be rendered ridiculous. It is apparent that Mr. de Voltaire has depended entirely on the aſſiſtance of a dictionary to enable him *to give the moſt faithful tranſlation that can be, and the only faithful one, in the French language, of any author, ancient or modern.*

It is neceſſary to preſent to thoſe readers who do not underſtand French, the miſerable miſtakes and galamatheus of this dictionary work. Brutus, in his ſoliloquy meditating on what Caſſius had been urging concerning Cæſar, thus expreſſes his apprehenſion, that imperial power may change the conduct of the man.

BRUTUS.

'Tis a common proof,
That lowlineſs is young ambitions ladder,
Whereto the climber upwards turns his face;
But when he once attains the utmoſt round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, ſcorning the baſe degrees
By which he did aſcend. So Cæſar may.

Thus

Thus Mr. Voltaire tranſlates it,

BRUTUS.

——On ſait aſſez quelle eſt l' ambition.
L' échelle des grandeurs à ſes yeux ſe préſente ;
Elle y monte en cachant ſon front aux ſpectateurs ;
Et quand elle eſt haut, alors elle ſe montre ;
Alors juſques au ciel élevant ſes regards,
D'un coup d'œil mepriſant ſa vanité dédaigne
Les premiers échelons qui firent ſa grandeur.
C'eſt ce que peut Cæſar.

" One knows what ambition is ; the ladder of grandeurs preſents itſelf to her ; in going up ſhe hides her face from the ſpectators ; when ſhe is at the top then ſhe ſhews herſelf ; then riſing her view to the heavens, with a ſcornful look her vanity diſdains the ſteps of the ladder that made her greatneſs. This it is that Cæſar may do."

In the original, lowlineſs is young ambition's ladder ; the man who by feign'd humility, and courteſy, has attained to the power to which he aſpired, turns his back on thoſe humble means by which he aſcended to it ; the metaphor agreeing both to the man who has gained the top of the ladder, or to him who has riſen to the ſummit of power. In the tranſlation, ambition aſcends by ſteps of grandeurs, hiding her face from the ſpectators, when ſhe is

is at the top, with a look or glance of her eye her vanity diſdains the firſt ſteps ſhe took; which ſteps obſerve were grandeurs; ſo the allegory is, vanity and ambition diſdaining grandeur; and the image preſented is a woman climbing up a ladder, which is not a very common object, but more ſo than vanity's diſdaining grandeurs.

I am ſorry the tranſlator had not a better Engliſh Dictionary, for on that, not on his own knowledge of our tongue, it is plain he depended. In another inſtance it miſleads him. After Portia had importuned Brutus to communicate to her the ſecret cauſe of his perturbation, he ſays to her,

BRUTUS.

Porcia, go in a while,
And, by and by, thy boſom ſhall partake
The ſecrets of my heart.
All my engagements I will conſtrue to thee,
All the charactary of my ſad brows.—
Leave me with haſte.

The dictionary was conſulted for the word conſtrue; and thus, according to the uſual form, one may ſuppoſe it to have ſtood: To conſtrue, to interpret. This not ſerving the purpoſe to interpret was next

next ſought; there he finds, to interpret or to explain; again with indefatigable induſtry, excited by a deſire to excel all tranſlators and tranſlations, he has recourſe to the article to explain; under this head he finds, to unfold or clear up; ſo away goes the tranſlator to clear up the countenance of Brutus.

Va, mes ſourcils froncés prennent un air plus doux.

"Go;" ſays he; "my frowning brow ſhall take a ſofter air."

There are ſo many groſs blunders in this work it would be tedious to point them out; but it is to be hoped they will deter other beaux eſprits from attempting to hurt works of genius by the maſked battery of an unfair tranſlation. Mr. Voltaire deſires that by his tranſlation all Europe will compare the thoughts, the ſtile, and the judgment of Shakeſpear, with the thoughts, the ſtile, and the judgment of Corneille. It is difficult, perhaps impoſſible, to make the graces of ſtyle paſs from one language to another; and our blank verſe cannot be equalled by French blank verſe. The thoughts might in ſome meaſure have been given, if the tranſlator had underſtood the words in which Shakeſpear had expreſſed them.

them. Upon the judgement of the authors in the choice of the ſtory, in the conduct of it, in exciting the ſympathies belonging to it, in the faſhioning of the characters, in the nobleneſs of ſentiment, and the repreſentation of Roman manners, we ſhall upon cloſe examination of the Cinna and Julius Cæſar be able to pronounce.

As the ſubject of the drama is built on a conſpiracy which every one is aſſured had not any effect, and the author has ſo conducted it as to render the pardon Auguſtus gives the conſpirators an act of political prudence, rather than generous clemency, there is not any thing to intereſt us but the characters of Cinna, Emilia, and Maximus. Let us examine how far they are worthy to do ſo as ſet forth in this piece; for we have no hiſtorical acquaintance with them. Emilia is the daughter of Toranius the tutor of Auguſtus, who was proſcribed by him in his triumvirate. As we have not any knowledge of this Toranius, we are no more concerned about any cruelty committed upon him than upon any other man, ſo we are not prepared to enter into the outragious reſentment of Emilia, eſpecially as we ſee her in the court

of

of Auguſtus under the ſacred relation of his adopted daughter, enjoying all the privileges of that diſtinguiſhed ſituation, and treated with the tenderneſs of paternal love. Nothing ſo much deforms the feminine character as ferocity of ſentiment. Nothing ſo deeply ſtains the human character as ingratitude.

This lady, however odious ſhe appears to the ſpectator, is made to engage Cinna her lover, who is a nephew of the great Pompey, in a conſpiracy againſt Auguſtus, Shakeſpear moſt judiciouſly laboured to ſhew that Brutus's motives to kill Cæſar were perfectly generous and purely-public ſpirited. Corneille has not kindled Cinna to his enterprize with any ſpark of Roman fire. In every thing he appears treacherous, baſe, and timid. Maximus, the other conſpirator, ſeems at firſt a better character; but in the third act he makes a moſt lamentable confeſſion to a ſlave, of his love for Emilia, and his jealouſy of Cinna: this ſlave gives ſuch advice as one might expect from ſuch a councellor; he urges him to betray his aſſociates, and by means of a lie, to prevail upon Emilia to go off with him. Thus Maximus becomes as treacherous and baſe as Cinna his friend, and

and Emilia his miſtreſs. The poet follows Seneca's account of this affair in making Livia (who has no other buſineſs in the drama) adviſe Auguſtus to try the effect of meaſures of clemency, as his puniſhment of former conſpiracies excited new ones. Auguſtus tells her ſhe talks like a woman, treats her counſel with ſcorn, and then follows it. Auguſtus appears with dignity and ſenſe in the other ſcene, and is the only perſon in the play for whom one has any reſpect. This is the plan of a work which is to ſhew Corneille's genius and judgment ſuperior to Shakeſpear's. As Mr. Voltaire has given his tranſlation of Julius Cæſar, I will juſt preſent to the reader a literal tranſlation of the firſt ſcene of the firſt act, which begins by a ſoliloquy.

CINNA, TRAGEDIE.

ACTE PREMIER. SCENE PREMIERE.

EMILIE.

Impatiens déſirs d'une illuſtre vengeance,
Dont la mort de mon pere a formé la naiſſance,
Enfans impetueux de mon reſſentiment,
Que ma douleur ſeduite embraſſe aveuglement,
Vous prenez ſur mon ame un trop puiſſant empire.
Durant quelques momens ſouffrez que je reſpire,
Et que je conſidere, en l'etat où je ſuis,
Et ce que je hazarde, & ce que je pourſuis.

Quand

Quand je regarde Auguſte au milieu de ſa gloire,
Et que vous reprochez à ma triſte mémoire
Que par ſa propre main mon pére maſſacré
Du trône où je le vois fait le premier degré :
Quand vous me preſentez cette ſanglante image,
La cauſe de ma haine, & l'effet de ſa rage,
Je m'abandonne toute à vos ardens tranſports,
Et crois pour une mort lui devoir mille morts.
Au milieu toutefois d'une fureur ſi juſte,
J'aime encor plus Cinna que je ne haïs Auguſte ;
Et je ſens refroidir ce bouillant mouvement,
Quand il faut pour le ſuivre expoſer mon amant.
Oui, Cinna, contre moi-même je m'irrite,
Quand je ſonge aux dangers où je te precipite
Quoique pour me ſervir tu n'apprehendes rien,
Te demander du ſang, c'eſt expoſer le tien.
D'une ſi haute place on n'abat point de tête
Sans attirer ſur ſoi mille & mile tempêtes ;
L'iſſue en eſt douteuſe, & le peril certain.
Un ami deloyal peut trahir ton deſſein ;
L'ordre mal concerté, l'occaſion mal priſe,
Peuvent ſur ſon auteur renverſer l'enterpriſe,
Tourner ſur tois les coups dont tu le veux frapper ;
Dans ſa ruine même il peut t'enveloper ;
Et quoi qu'en ma faveur ton amour exécute,
Il te peut en tombant écraſer ſous ſa chute,
Ah ! ceſſe de courir à ce mortel danger :
Te perdre enme vengeant ce n'eſt pas me venger.
Un cœur eſt trop cruel quand il trouve des charmes
Aux douceurs que corrompt l'amertume des larmes ;
Et l'on doit mettre au rang des plus cuiſans malheurs
La mort d'un ennemi qui coute tant de pleurs.

Mais peut-on en verſer alors qu'on venge un pere ?
Eſt-il perte à ce prix qui ne ſemble légére?

Et

Et quand ſon aſſaſſin tombe ſous notre effort,
Doit on conſiderer ce que coûte ſa mort ?
Ceſſez, vaines frayeurs, ceſſez, lâches tendreſſes,
De jetter dans mon cœur vos indignes faibleſſes ;
Et toi qui les produis par tes ſoins ſuperflus,
Amour, ſers mon devoir, & ne le combats plus.
Lui ceder c'eſt ta gloire, & le vaincre ta honte ;
Montre-toi genereux, ſouffrant qu'il te ſurmonte.
Plus tu lui donneras, plus il te va donner,
Et ne triomphera que pour te couronner.

I do not pretend, as Mr. Voltaire does, to make the reader a judge of the ſtile of Corneille by my tranſlation ; he muſt allow for the want of verſification, and be content with the thoughts, the ſentiments, the conceits of the original.

EMILIA.

" Impatient deſires of an illuſtrious vengeance, to which the death of my father gave birth, impetuous children of my reſentment, which my deluded ſorrow embraces too blindly, you aſſume too great an empire over my mind. Suffer me to breathe a moment, and let me conſider the ſtate I am in, what I hazard, and what I would attempt. When I behold Cæſar in the midſt of glory, you (I ſuppoſe this means, you, the impetuous children of the impatient deſires of an illuſtrious vengeance,

geance) reproach my melancholy memory that my father, maſſacred by his hand, was the firſt ſtep to the throne on which I ſee him. And when you preſent me that bloody image, the cauſe of my hatred, the effect of his rage, I abandon myſelf to your violent tranſports, and think that for one death I owe him a thouſand deaths. In the midſt of ſo juſt an indignation I ſtill love Cinna more than I hate Auguſtus; and I find this boiling anger cool, when to obey it I muſt hazard my lover. Yes, Cinna, againſt myſelf, myſelf am angry, when I think of the dangers into which I precipitate thee. Though to ſerve me thou feareſt nothing, to aſk thee for blood is to expoſe thine. One beats not down heads from ſo high a place without drawing upon one's ſelf a thouſand and a thouſand ſtorms; the iſſue is doubtful, the peril is certain. The order ill concerted, the opportunity ill choſen, may on their author overturn the whole enterprize, turn on thee the blow thou wouldſt ſtrike, and even envelope thee in his ruin; and what thou executeſt for my ſake may cruſh thee in its fall. Ah! do not run into this danger. To ruin yourſelf in revenging me is not to revenge me. That heart is too cruel which finds a ſweetneſs

neſs in that vengeance which is corrupted by the bitterneſs of ſorrow; and one ſhould put in the rank of the greateſt misfortunes the death of an enemy which coſts ſo many tears. But can one ſhed tears when one revenges a father? Is there a loſs which does not ſeem light at that price? And when his aſſaſſin dies by our means, ought we to conſider what his death coſts us? Ceaſe vain fears, ceaſe fooliſh tenderneſs to affect my heart with your unworthy weakneſſes: and thou who produceſt them by thy ſuperfluous anxieties, O love, aſſiſt my duty, do not combat with it; to yield to it is thy glory, to vanquiſh it thy diſgrace; ſhew thyſelf generous, ſuffer it to overcome thee. The more thou giveſt to it, the more it will give thee, and will triumph only to crown thee."

Such mighty nothings in ſo ſtrange a ſtile
Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned ſmile.

The ſecond ſcene of Emilia, and Fulvia her friend, is not ſo abſurd as the ſoliloquy; but the anſwer Emilia gives to Fulvia, who urges to her, that the benefits ſhe had received from Auguſtus and the credit ſhe has with him ſhould mitigate her reſentment, ſhews her diſpoſition to be ungrateful, violent, and treacherous.

EMILIE.

EMILIE.

Les bienfaits ne ſont pas toûjours ce que tu penſes ;
D'une main odieuſe ils tiennent lieu d' offenſes :
Plus nous en prodiguons à qui nous peut hair,
Plus d'armes nous donnons à qui nous veut trahir.
Il m'en fait chaque jour ſans changer mon courage.
Je ſuis ce que j'etais, & je puis davantage ;
Et des mêmes préſens qu'il verſe dans mes mains
J' achette contre lui les eſprits des Romains.
Je recevrais de lui la place de Livie,
Comme un moyen plus ſur d'attenter à ſa vie.

"Benefits do not always do what you think. From an odious hand they are ſo many offences: the more we beſtow upon thoſe who hate us, the more arms we furniſh to thoſe who may betray us. He beſtows them upon me every day without changing my reſolution. I am what I was, and I am able to effect more; and with the preſents he pours into my hands I purchaſe the hearts of Romans to ſet them againſt him. I would receive from him the place of Livia, to gain ſurer means to attempt his life."

The next ſcene Cinna enters, and tells his furious charmer, that the conſpirators enter into the plot with as much zeal as if they too were ſerving a miſtreſs.

CINNA.

Tous s'y montrent portés avec tant d' allegreſſe,
Qu'ils ſemblent comme moi ſervir une maîtreſſe.—
Plût

Plût aux dieux que vous-même euſſiez vû de
quel zéle
Cette troupe entreprend une action ſi belle !
Au ſeul nom de Céſar, d' Auguſte, d' Empereur,
Vous euſſiez vû leurs yeux s'enflammer de fureur ;
Et dans un même inſtant, par un effet contraire,
Leur front pâlir d' horreur, & rougir de colere.

Here is a childiſh play upon words, and a mere rant: for in thoſe times neither the names of Cæſar, Auguſtus, or Emperor were deteſted; the monſters that afterwards aſſumed them might become odious.

The ſcene is very long as we may ſuppoſe where ſuch different ſentiments and paſſions are to be expreſſed as thoſe which belong to the lover and conſpirator. Cinna aſſures Emilia that he concealed from his aſſociates, that to avenge her father and obtain her he entered into this conſpiracy.

CINNA.

Rien n'eſt pour vous à craindre ; aucun de nos
amis
Ne ſait ni vos deſſeins, ni ce qui m'eſt promis :
Et leur parlant tantôt des miſeres Romaines,
Je leur ai tû la mort qui fait naître nos haines,
De peur que mon ardeur touchant vos intérêts
D'un ſi parfait amour ne trahît les ſecrets.

" There is nothing for you to fear; none of our friends know the deſigns, nor

what is promiſed me. In ſpeaking of the miſeries of the Romans I was ſilent about the death which is the cauſe of our hatred, leſt my warmth for your intereſts ſhould betray the ſecrets of ſuch a perfect love."

There was not only diſcretion but good ſenſe in this, for the ſecrets *d'un parfait amour* might not have been duly attended to or properly reverenced, by a ſurly band of conſpirators met to concert meaſures for ſuch a perilous enterprize. In the next ſcene Auguſtus ſends for Cinna and Maximus, to adviſe with them whether he ſhall reſtore liberty to the commonwealth. Here we have ſome reſpite from the ſtrange medley of tender love and dire revenge, and in lieu of it a long political diſcuſſion of the conveniences and inconveniencies of different modes of Government.

Corneille has borrowed from Dion Caſſius, and transferred to Cinna and Maximus, the ſpeeches of Agrippa and Mecenas, when Auguſtus conſulted them whether he ſhould demit his power, and live a private man, as Sylla had done. Mr. Fenelon has very juſtly cenſured, as ill ſuiting that ſimplicity of ſtyle and manner with which

which Auguſtus expreſſed himſelf, the following lines:

AUGUSTE.

Cet empire abſolu ſur la terre et ſur l'onde,
Ce pouvoir ſouverain que j'ai ſur tout le monde,
Cette grandeur ſans bornes, et cet illuſtre rang,
Qui m'a jadis coutê tant de peine et de ſang,
Enfin tout ce qu'adore en ma haute fortune
D'un courtiſan flateur la preſence importune,
N'eſt que de ces beautés dont l'eclat eblouit,
Et qu'on ceſſe d'aimer ſi-tot qu'on en jouit.

"This abſolute empire over the earth and ocean, this ſovereign power that I have over the whole world, this greatneſs without limits, and this illuſtrious rank which has heretofore coſt me ſo much labour and ſo much blood; in fine, all that the troubleſome croud of flattering courtiers adores in my high fortune, is but a piece of pageantry, whoſe luſtre dazzles, and that one ceaſes to admire as ſoon as one poſſeſſes it."

Theſe oſtentatious expreſſions are perfectly ridiculous to thoſe who are acquainted with the character of the ſpeaker: but there is another fault much more detrimental to the drama, which is the averſion we conceive at the black treachery of Cinna, who when Auguſtus conſults him as

his friend, whether he ſhall lay down his power, and reſtore liberty to the commonwealth, adviſes him him not to do it, with a great appearance of perſonal attachment to him, and zeal for his country; but in reality, that he may not loſe a pretence to ſacrifice him to the revenge of Emilia. This holds forth Cinna to the ſpectator as a perfidious friend, a wicked counſellor, a profligate citizen. A more atrocious conduct was perhaps never aſcribed to any character on the ſtage, where the guilty perſon was intended to excite indignation and abhorrence; and is therefore the moſt flagrantly abſurd in a caſe where the character is that on which the intereſt of the play is to turn.

Auguſtus having intimated to Cinna at the concluſion of their conference, that he was willing to give Emilia to him, he begins then to reflect upon his perfidy, and urges to Maximus the remorſe he feels for the intended aſſaſſination. The poet ſeems to be afraid he has not yet ſufficiently diſgraced his hero, and therefore makes Maximus reply to him thus:

MAXIME.

Formez vos remors d'une plus juſte cauſe,
De vos lâches conſeils, qui ſeuls ont arreté

Le

Le bonheur renaiſſant de notre liberté.
C'eſt vous ſeul aujourd'hui qui nous l'avez ôtée,
De la main de Céſar Brute l'eut acceptée,
Et n'eut jamais ſouffert qu'un interet leger
De vengeance ou d'amour l'eût remiſe en danger.

"Derive your remorſe from a juſter cauſe, from your baſe counſels, which alone put a ſtop to the felicity of reviving liberty. 'Tis you alone that have now deprived us of it. From the hand of Cæſar Brutus would have accepted the liberty of Rome; and never, from a paltry intereſt of love or revenge, would have again put it to hazard."

As every movement in this play is to turn on mean and ſelfiſh paſſions, as ſoon as Maximus apprehends his rival is to receive Emilia as the reward of his enterprize, he ſuffers his ſlave to betray the plot to Auguſtus. He then endeavours to perſuade Emilia to eſcape with him. All this is very aukwardly conducted.

It is ſtrange that a dramatic writer ſhould not have ſtudied human nature enough to perceive, that the only character, which cannot intereſt upon the ſtage, is that which is mean, low, and contemptible. Great ſpirits, even though of a

bad kind, engage our attention to all their operations, becauſe they are capable of producing great events. We are curious to ſee what the audacious villain will dare to do, what the cunning one will contrive; but when a man is preſented to us as a ſcoundrel, *un lache*, we diſdain to attend to his actions. Therefore, however well the great ſcenes of this play may be written; conſidered ſingly, they are very injudiciouſly managed. We ſhall now ſee Cinna appear ſo deſpicable, that to puniſh him would be below the dignity of Auguſtus; and to retain him as a friend, unworthy of any man. Auguſtus, informed by the double traitor Maximus, ſends for Cinna, and reproaches him with every ſpecies of baſe ingratitude, tells him he firſt gave him his life, enriched him with the ſpoils of Antony, upon every occaſion had been profuſely liberal and kind to him, preferred his intereſt even to thoſe who had fought for him, and by whoſe blood he had purchaſed the empire; and had admitted him, upon the death of Mecenas, into the firſt place in his confidence. Auguſtus adds too, that it was by his advice he retained his power; and after all this, ſays he, you would aſſaſſinate me. Cinna does not barely deny the conſpiracy, but exclaims,

" I, Sir,

" I, Sir, have I ſuch a treacherous ſoul,
" ſuch a baſe deſign!"

Auguſtus cuts him ſhort in this diſgraceful lie, ſhewing him he has full information of the plot; and very juſtly ſays, " The liberty of thy country could not be thy object, for then thou wouldſt not have hindered my reſtoring it. Thou muſt deſign therefore to reign in my place. Alas! Rome muſt be unhappy indeed, if I were the only obſtacle, and that after my death it ſhould not fall into better hands than thine. Learn to know what thou art: deſcend into thyſelf: thou art honoured, praiſed, and loved, and all tremble before thee, ſo high have I raiſed thy fortune: but thou wouldſt be the pity of thoſe who now envy that fortune, if I abandoned thee to thy own little merit. Contradict me if thou canſt; tell me what is thy merit, what are thy virtues, what are thy glorious exploits, what are thoſe rare qualities by which thou could'ſt pretend to my favour, what is it raiſes thee above the vulgar? My favour is thy only glory; thy power ariſes from it; that alone raiſes and ſupports thee; it is that, not thou, which is reſpected: thou haſt neither rank nor credit but what ariſes from it; and to let thee fall,

I need only draw back the hand that ſupports thee."

Quel etait ton deſſein, et que pretendais-tu,
Après m'avoir au temple a tes pieds abattu ?
Affranchir ton pays d'un pouvoir monarchique ?
Si j'ai bien entendu tantôt ta politique,
Son ſalut deſormais depend d'un ſouverain,
Qui pour tout conſerver tienne tout en ſa main ;
Et ſi ſa liberté te faiſait entreprendre,
Tu ne m'euſſes jamais empeché de la rendre ;
Tu l'aurais acceptée au nom de tout l'etat,
Sans vouloir l'acquerir par un aſſaſſinat.
Quel etait donc ton but ? d'y regner et ma place ?
D'un etrange malheur ſon deſtin le menace,
Si pour monter au trône et lui donner la loi,
Tu ne trouves dans Rome autre obſtacle que moi;
Si juſques a ce point ſon ſort eſt deplorable,
Que tu ſois après moi le plus conſiderable :
Et que ce grand fardeu de l'empire Romain
Ne puiſſe après ma mort tomber mieux qu'en ta main.
Apprens à te connaître, et deſcens en toi-même.
On t'honore dans Rome, on te courtiſe, on t'aime ;
Chacun tremble ſous toi, chacun t' offre des vœux ;
Ta fortune eſt bien haut, tu peux ce que je veux :
Mais tu ferais pitié, même a ceux qu'elle irrite,
Si je t' abandonnais a ton peu de merite.
Oſe me dementir, dis-moi ce que tu vaux,
Conte-moi tes vertus, tes glorieux travaux,
Les rares qualités par ou tu m'as dû plaire,
Et tout ce qui t'eleve au-deſſus du vulgaire.
Ma faveur fait ta gloire, & ton pouvoir en vient ;
Elle ſeule t'eleve, & ſeule te ſoutient,
C'eſt elle qu'on adore, et non pas ta perſonne,
Tu n'as crèdit ni rang qu'autant qu'elle t'en donne;
Et pour te faire choir je n'aurais aujourd'hui
Qu' a retirer la main qui ſeule eſt ton appui.

Emilia

Emilia enters, and behaves with the moſt inſolent pride, undaunted aſſurance, and unfeeling ingratitude; and declares to Auguſtus, that as long as ſhe is handſome enough to get lovers he ſhall never want enemies. Auguſtus ſtill adheres to his plan of clemency, (for that too is plan, and the reſult of prudent deliberation, not of generous magnanimity) he pardons Maximus, forgives Cinna in ſpite of his unworthineſs, and beſtows upon him Emilia and the conſulſhip. Emilia is at laſt mitigated, and modeſtly tells Auguſtus that heaven has ordained a change in the commonwealth ſince it has changed her heart. What is there in all this that can move either pity or terror? In what is it moral, in what is it intereſting, where is it pathetic?

It is a common error in the plan of Corneille's tragedies, that the intereſt of the piece turns upon ſome unknown perſon, generally a haughty princeſs; ſo that inſtead of the repreſentation of an important event, and the characters of illuſtrious perſons, the buſineſs of the drama is the love-intrigue of a termagant lady, who, if ſhe is a Roman, inſults the Barbarians, if ſhe is a Barbarian, braves the Romans,

and even to her lover is inſolent and fierce. Were ſuch a perſon to be produced on our theatre, ſhe would be taken for a mad poeteſs eſcaped from her keepers in Bedlam, who, fancying herſelf a queen, was ranting and delivering her mandates in rhyme upon the ſtage. All the excuſe that can be made for Corneille in ſuch repreſentation, is, that characters like theſe, dignified indeed with nobler ſentiments, were admired in the romances in which the manners of chivalry are exaggerated. By the inſtitutions of chivalry every valiant knight profeſſed a peculiar devotion to the fair ſex, in whoſe cauſe, as the champion of the defenceleſs, and protector of the oppreſſed, he was always ready to take arms. A lady's intereſt being often the object, and ſometimes her perſon the prize of a combat, ſhe was ſuppoſed to inſpire his courage; and, as he was to be not leſs diſtinguiſhed for politeneſs than valour, he affected an air of ſubmiſſive obedience, while ſhe, by the courteſy of knighthood, was allowed to aſſume a ſtile of ſuperiority and command. To carry theſe manners into ancient Greece and Rome, and weave them into a conſpiracy there, betrays want of judgment. In the ſtrain of romance this drama is carried on. The lady enjoins her

her lover to kill Auguſtus; that adventure atchieved he is to hope for her hand; his glory is to be derived from her acknowledging him worthy of it; ſhe is continually exhorting him to deſerve the honour of being beloved by her. The fate of Auguſtus, of the Roman empire, all the duties of the citizen and the friend, are to depend on her deciſion. She ſays to Auguſtus, when he has diſcovered the conſpiracy, as a ſufficient vindication of her lover,

Oui, tout ce qu'il a fait, il l'a fait pour me plaire,
Et j'en etois, ſeigneur, la cauſe et le ſalaire.

The author certainly intended to recommend Cinna to his ſpectators merely as *a loyal lover*, according to the phraſe of romance: in every other light he appears contemptible, and indeed ſuffers himſelf to be uſed with the greateſt contempt and indignity. As Shakeſpear laboured to ſhew that the motives of Brutus were untinctured by any bad paſſion: on the contrary every movement in the mind of Cinna has the character of baſeneſs, and whether he conſpires or whether he repents of it, he is ſtill, as he acknowledges himſelf to be,

Un eſprit malheureux,
Qui ne forme qu'en lache un deſſein genereux.

From

From this unhappy wretch who baſely conceives a generous deſign, let us turn to Brutus. There we ſhall ſee the different judgment and genius of the artiſts. Brutus and Cinna are drawn in the ſame ſituation, conſpiring againſt the foremoſt man of all this world: in the one we have the features and complexion of a villain, in the other the high-finiſhed form of a noble patriot.

UPON

UPON THE

DEATH

OF

JULIUS CÆSAR.

UPON THE

DEATH

OF

JULIUS CÆSAR.

THE tragedies of Cinna, and Julius Cæſar, are each of them the repreſentation of a conſpiracy; but it cannot be denied, that our countryman has been by far more judicious in his choice of the ſtory. An abortive ſcheme, in which ſome people of obſcure fame were engaged, and even in whom, as they are repreſented, the attempt was pardoned, more from contempt of their abilities and power, than the clemency of the emperor, makes a poor figure in contraſt with that conſpiracy, which, formed by the firſt characters in Rome, effected the deſtruction of the greateſt man the world ever produced, and

was

was ſucceeded by the moſt memorable conſequences. Hiſtory furniſhes various examples of baſe and treacherous natures, of diſſolute manners, ruined fortunes, and loſt reputations, uniting in horrid aſſociation to deſtroy their prince. Ambition often cuts itſelf a bloody way to greatneſs. —Exaſperated miſery ſometimes plunges its deſperate dagger in the breaſt of the oppreſſor. The cabal of a court the mutiny of a camp, the wild zeal of fanatics, have often produced events of that nature. But this conſpiracy was formed of very different elements. It was the genius of Rome, the rights of her coſtitution, the ſpirit of her laws, that roſe againſt the ambition of Cæſar; they ſteeled the heart, and whetted the dagger of the mild, the virtuous, the gentle Brutus, to give the mortal wound, not to a tyrant, who had faſtened fetters on his fellow-citizens, but to the conqueror, who had made the world wear their chains: one empire only remained unſubjected to them, and that he was preparing to ſubdue.

Can there be a ſubject more worthy of the tragic muſe, than the imitation of an action ſo important in its conſequences, and unparalleled in all its circumſtances? How

is

is our curioſity excited to diſcover what could engage the man of virtue in an enterprize of ſuch a terrible kind; and why, after its accompliſhment, inſtead of being ſtigmatized with the name of conſpirator and aſſaſſin, the decrees of an auguſt ſenate, the voice of Rome, unite to place him one of the firſt on the roll of patriots; and the ſucceſſor of the murdered Cæſar, who devoted to deſtruction the moſt illuſtrious men of Rome, durſt not offer violation to the ſtatue of Brutus!

To obtain, from the Engliſh ſpectator the ſame reverence for him, it was neceſſary we ſhould be made to imbibe thoſe doctrines, and to adopt the opinion by which he himſelf was actuated. We muſt be in the very capitol of Rome; ſtand at the baſe of Pompey's ſtatue, ſurrounded by the effigies of their patriots; we muſt be taught to adore the images of Junius Brutus, the Horatii, Decii, Fabii, and all who had offered dear and bloody ſacrifice to the liberty of their country, to ſee this action in the point of view to which it offered itſelf to the deliberation of Brutus, and by which it was beheld by thoſe who judged of it when done. To the very ſcene, to the very time, therefore, does our poet tranſport

tranſport us: at Rome we become Romans; we are affected by their manners; we are caught by their enthuſiaſm. But what a variety of imitations were there to be made by the artiſt to affect this! and who but Shakeſpear was capable of ſuch a taſk? A poet of ordinary genius would have endeavoured to intereſt us for Brutus, by the means of ſome imagined fond mother, or fonder miſtreſs. But can a few female tears wipe out the ſtains of aſſaſſination? A baſe conſpirator, a vile aſſaſſin, like the wretched Cinna of Corneille, would Brutus have appeared to us, if only the ſame feeble arts had been exerted for him. It is for the genuine ſon of ancient Rome, the lover of the liberty of his country, we are intereſted. A concern raiſed for him, from compaſſion to any other perſon, would only have excited ſome painful emotions in the ſpectator, ariſing from diſcordant ſentiments. Indeed the common aim of tragedy writers ſeems to be merely to make us uneaſy, for ſome reaſon or other, during the drama. They take any thing to be a tragedy in which there are great perſons, and much lamentation; but our poet never repreſents an action of one ſort, and raiſes emotions and paſſions of another ſort. He excites the ſympathies, and the concern

cern, proper to the ſtory. The paſſion of love, or maternal affection, may give good ſubjects for a tragedy. In the fables of Phædra and Merope thoſe ſentiments belong to the action; but they had no ſhare in the reſolution taken to kill Cæſar; and, if they are made to interfere, they adulterate the imitation; if to predominate, they ſpoil it. Our author diſdains the legerdemain trick of ſubſtituting one paſſion for another. He is the great magician that can call forth paſſions of any ſort. If they are ſuch as time has deſtroyed, or cuſtom extinguiſhed, he ſummons from the dead thoſe ſouls in which they once exiſted. Having ſufficiently enlarged on the general ſcope of our author in this play, we will now conſider it in the detail.

The firſt ſcene is in the ſtreets of Rome. The tribunes chide the people for gathering together to do honour to Cæſar's triumph. As certain decorums did not employ the attention of the writers of Shakeſpear's days, he ſuffers ſome poor mechanics to be too loquacious. As it was his buſineſs to depreſs the character of Cæſar, and render his victory over his illuſtrious rival as odious as poſſible, he judiciouſly makes

makes one of the tribunes thus addreſs himſelf to the people;

MARULLUS.

Wherefore rejoice? What conqueſts brings he home?
What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?
You blocks, you ſtones, you worſe than ſenſeleſs things!
O you hard hearts! you cruel men of Rome!
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have ye climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have ſat
The live-long day with patient expectation,
To ſee great Pompey paſs the ſtreets of Rome;
And when you ſaw his chariot but appear,
Have you not made an univerſal ſhout,
That Tyber trembled underneath his banks
To hear the replication of your ſounds,
Made in his concave ſhores?
And do you now put on your beſt attire?
And do you now cull out an holiday?
And do you now ſtrew flowers in his way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
Be gone———
Run to your houſes, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the gods, to intermit the plague
That needs muſt light on this ingratitude.

The next ſpeech ſhews the general apprehenſion of Cæſar's aſſuming too great a degree of power.

FLAVIUS.

Let no images
Be hung with Cæſar's trophies. I'll about,
And drive away the vulgar from the ſtreets·

So

So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
These growing feathers, pluckt from Cæſar's wing,
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch;
Who elſe would ſoar above the view of men,
And keeps us all in ſervile fearfulneſs.

The ſecond ſcene is the courſe at the Lupercal games, in which Antony appears the humble courtier of Cæſar. A ſoothſayer bids him beware the ides of March.

In the third ſcene there is a dialogue between Brutus and Caſſius, in which the latter tenderly reproaches Brutus that his countenance is not ſo open and cordial to him as formerly; to this the other replies, he has ſome inward diſcontent,

And that poor Brutus, with himſelf at war,
Forgets the ſhews of love to other men.

This intimation of diſcontent encourages Caſſius to try to incenſe Brutus againſt the growing power of Cæſar. On the ſhouts of the mob, Brutus expreſſes a fear that they are making Cæſar king, this encourages Caſſius to proceed in his deſign. He makes two ſpeeches, in which he appears envious and malignant to Cæſar, of whom he ſpeaks as men do, who, unwilling to confeſs the qualities that give to a rival ſuperiority, dwell with the malice on petty circumſtances,

cumſtances, in which he is not diſtinguiſhed from ordinary men. The French critic is much offended at this ſcene, and ſays, it is not in the ſtyle of great men. The language of envy is always low. The ſpeeches of Caſſius expreſs well his envious and peeviſh temper, and make him a foil to ſet off to advantage the more noble mind of Brutus. Caſſius endeavours to ſtimulate Brutus to oppoſe the encroachments of Cæſar on the liberty of Rome, by ſetting before him its firſt deliverer, the great Junius Brutus; a name revered by every Roman, but, undoubtedly, adored by his deſcendants.

This is truly imitation, when the poet gives us the juſt copies of all circumſtances that accompanied the action he repreſents. Corneille's dramas are fantaſtic compoſitions, void of hiſtorical truth, imitation of character, or repreſentation of manners. Some few lines from Seneca, ingrafted into the Cinna, have given it reputation. For, however cuſtom may have taught a very ingenious and polite people to endure the inſipid ſcenes of *l'amoureux et l'amoureuſe*, the fault has been in the poets, not the ſpectators: all their critics have ſtrongly condemned this mode of writing; and the public,

public, by its approbation of this piece on account of the ſcenes between Auguſtus and Cinna, ſhews plainly how much dialogues of a noble and manly kind would pleaſe. Unhappily, Seneca's Auguſtus makes the Cinna of Corneille appear too mean and little. Theſe borrowed ornaments never will aſſort perfectly well with the piece; they break in upon the harmony of ſentiment, and the proportion of characters, and fall greatly ſhort of the eaſy propriety, and becoming grace, of a perfect ſet of imitations deſigned for, and fitted to the work, as in this tragedy of Julius Cæſar, where all characters appear in due degrees of ſubordination to the hero of the piece. Our poet, to intereſt us the more for Brutus, takes every occaſion to make Caſſius a foil for him. In the next ſcene he is repreſented by Cæſar in an unamiable light; the opportunity of ſo fit an occaſion is taken, to make ſome fine reflections on the malignant and envious nature of men, not ſoftened by the joys of mirth, and endearing intercourſe of ſocial pleaſures.

CÆSAR. *(To* ANTONY, *apart.)*

Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men, and ſuch as ſleep a-nights:
Yon Caſſius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.

ANTONY

ANTONY.

Fear him not, Cæſar, he's not dangerous;
He is a noble Roman, and well given.

CÆSAR.

Would he were fatter. But I fear him not:
Yet if my name were liable to fear,
I do not know the man I ſhould avoid,
So ſoon as that ſpare Caſſius. He reads much;
He is a great obſerver; and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
As thou doſt, Antony; he hears no muſic;
Seldom he ſmiles, and ſmiles in ſuch a ſort,
As if he mock'd himſelf, and ſcorn'd his ſpirit,
That could be mov'd to ſmile at any thing.
Such men as he be never at heart's eaſe
Whilſt they behold a greater than themſelves;
And therefore are they very dangerous.

Caſca's blunt recital of the offer of a crown to Cæſar, in the next ſcene, is much cenſured by the critic, accuſtomed to the decorums of the French theatre. It is not improbable the poet might have in his eye ſome perſon of eminence in his days, who was diſtinguiſhed by ſuch manners. Many alluſions and imitations which pleaſe at the time, are loſt to poſterity, unleſs they point at tranſactions and perſons of the firſt conſequence. Whether we approve ſuch a character on the ſtage or not, we muſt allow his narration repreſents the deſigns of Cæſar's party, and the averſion of the Roman people to that royalty to which he aſpired;

aſpired; and it was right to avoid engaging the parties in more deep diſcourſe, as Shakeſpear intended, by a ſort of hiſtorical proceſs, to ſhew how Brutus was led on to that act to which his nature was averſe.

The firſt ſcene of the ſecond act preſents Brutus debating with himſelf upon the point on which Caſſius had been urging him. Caſſius in his ſoliloquy, ſcene third, act firſt, ſeemed to intimate, that reſentment had a ſhare in his deſire to take off Cæſar. Brutus, on the contrary, informs us, no perſonal motives ſway him, but ſuch as are derived from an hereditary averſion to tyranny, and the pledge the virtue of his anceſtors had given the commonwealth, that a Brutus would not ſuffer a king in Rome; and theſe conſiderations compel him to take the following reſolution:

BRUTUS.

It muſt be by his death; and, for my part,
I know no perſonal cauſe to ſpurn at him;
But for the general. He would be crown'd;
How that might change his nature, there's the queſtion.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder;
And that craves wary walking: Crown him--that--
And then I grant we put a ſting in him,
That at his will he may do danger with.
Th' abuſe of greatneſs is, when it disjoins
Remorſe from power: and to ſpeak truth of Cæſar,

I have not known when his affections ſway'd
More than his reaſon. But 'tis a common proof,
That lowlineſs is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber upwards turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmoſt round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, ſcorning the baſe degrees
By which he did aſcend. So Cæſar may:
Then, leſt he may, prevent.

How averſe he is to the means by which he is to deliver his country from the danger apprehended, appears in the following words:

BRUTUS.

Since Caſſius firſt did whet me againſt Cæſar,
I have not ſlept.
Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
And the firſt motion, all the interim is
Like a phantaſma, or an hideous dream:
The genius, and the mortal inſtruments,
Are then in council; and the ſtate of man,
Like to a little kingdom, ſuffers then
The nature of an inſurrection.

Diſguiſe and concealment are ſo abhorrent to the open ingenuity of his nature, that righteous as he thinks the cauſe in which he is going to engage, on hearing his friends are come to him muffled up at midnight, he cannot help breaking out in the following manner.

BRUTUS.

O Conſpiracy!
Sham'ſt thou to ſhew thy dang'rous brow by night,
When

When evils are moſt free? O then, by day
Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough.
To maſk thy monſtrous viſage? Seek none, Conſpiracy,
Hide it in ſmiles of affability;
For if thou put thy native ſemblance on,
Not Erebus itſelf were dim enough
To hide thee from prevention.

Brutus riſes far above his friend and aſſociate Caſſius, when, with a noble diſdain, he rejects his propoſal of ſwearing to their reſolution.

BRUTUS.

No, not an oath. If not the face of men,
The ſufferance of our ſouls, the time's abuſe,
If theſe be motives weak, break off betimes,
And ev'ry man hence to his idle bed;
So let high-ſighted tyranny range on,
'Till each man drop by lottery. But if theſe,
As I am ſure they do, bear fire enough
To kindle cowards, and to ſteel with valour
The melting ſpirits of women; then, countrymen,
What need we any ſpur, but our own cauſe,
To prick us to redreſs? what other bond,
Than ſecret Romans, that have ſpoke the word,
And will not palter? and what other oath,
Than honeſty to honeſty engag'd
That this ſhall be, or we will fall for it?
Swear prieſts, and cowards, and men cautelous,
Old feeble carrions, and ſuch ſuffering ſouls
That welcome wrongs: unto bad cauſes, ſwear
Such creatures as men doubt; but do not ſtain
The even virtue of our enterprize,
Nor the inſuppreſſive mettle of our ſpirits,
To think, that or our cauſe, or our performance,
Did need an oath: when every drop of blood
That ev'ry Roman bears, and nobly bears,

Is guilty of a ſeveral Baſtardy,
If he doth break the ſmalleſt particle
Of any promiſe that hath paſt from him.

Is it not wonderful to ſee a poor player thus ennoble the ſentiments, and give full expanſion to the magnanimity of the man ſtyled the deliverer of Rome?

Mr. Voltaire is ſo little ſenſible of the noble delicacy of this ſpeech, that he ſays the conſpirators are not Romans, but a parcel of country-fellows of a former age who conſpire in a tippling-houſe.——Surely there is no partiality in ſaying our author has given Roman ſentiments with a tincture of the Platonic philoſophy to Brutus; and, beſides theſe more general characteriſtics, has added many nice touches which ſpecify his perſonal qualities. We behold on the ſtage the Marcus Brutus of Plutarch rendered more amiable and more intereſting. A peculiar gentleneſs of manners, and delicacy of mind, diſtinguiſh him from all the other conſpirators; and we cannot refuſe to concur with the confeſſion of his enemies, and the words of Antony.

ANTONY.

This was the nobleſt Roman of them all:
All the conſpirators, ſave only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Cæſar;

He

He, only in a general honeſt thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him, that nature might ſtand up,
And ſay to all the world; *This was a man!*

The following ſoliloquy prophetic of the civil war, ſubſequent to the death of Cæſar, ſpoken by Antony addreſſing himſelf to the dead body, is ſublime and ſolemn.

ANTONY.

O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
That I am meek and gentle with theſe butchers.
Thou art the ruins of the nobleſt man,
That ever lived in the tide of times.
Woe to the hand that ſhed this coſtly blood!
Over thy wounds now do I propheſy,
Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips,
To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue,
A curſe ſhall light upon the limbs of men;
Domeſtic fury and fierce civil ſtrife,
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
Blood and deſtruction ſhall be ſo in uſe,
And dreadful objects ſo familiar,
That mothers ſhall but ſmile, when they behold
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war:
All pity choak'd with cuſtom of fell deeds;
And Cæſar's ſpirit raging for revenge,
With Até by his ſide come hot from hell,
Shall in theſe confines, with a monarch's voice
Cry Havock, and let ſlip the dogs of war.

This ſpeech ſhews the ſecret enmity Antony bears to the conſpirators, and prepares us for the inflammatory oration which at the obſequies of Cæſar he pro-

nounces before the people.—I ſhall quote it at length, for as this tragedy has been brought by Mr. Voltaire into a compariſon with the Cinna of Corneille, and he is pleaſed to call our Engliſh piece a monſtrous ſpectacle, and takes not the leaſt notice of a ſpeech which may be conſidered as one of the fineſt pieces of Rhetoric that is extant, I am deſirous to ſet it immediately before the reader, who will hardly find any thing monſtrous in its form, or abſurd in its matter, but quite the reverſe. I ſuppoſe a popular addreſs and manner, in an oration deſigned for the populace, would be deemed the moſt proper by the beſt critics in the art of rhetoric.

ANTONY.

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.
I come to bury Cæſar, not to praiſe him.
The evil, that men do, lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Cæſar! noble Brutus
Hath told you Cæſar was ambitious;
If it were ſo it was a grievous fault,
And grievouſly hath Cæſar anſwer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus, and the reſt,
For Brutus is an honourable man,
So are they all, all honourable men,
Come I to ſpeak in Cæſar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and juſt to me;
But Brutus ſays, he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.

He

He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whoſe ranſoms did the general coffers fill;
Did this in Cæſar ſeem ambitious?
When that the poor have cry'd, Cæſar hath wept;
Ambition ſhould be made of ſterner ſtuff,
Yet Brutus ſays, he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did ſee, that, on the Lupercal
I thrice preſented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuſe. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus ſays, he was ambitious;
And, ſure he is an honourable man.
I ſpeak not, to diſprove what Brutus ſpoke,
But here I am to ſpeak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without a cauſe;
What cauſe with-holds you then to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutiſh beaſts,
And men have loſt their reaſon. Bear with me.
My heart is in the coffin there with Cæſar,
And I muſt pauſe 'till it come back to me.

1 PLEBEIAN.

Methinks, there is much reaſon in his ſayings, &c.

ANTONY.

But yeſterday the word of Cæſar might
Have ſtood againſt the world; now lies he there,
And none ſo poor to do him reverence.
O maſters! if I were diſpos'd to ſtir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I ſhould do Brutus wrong, and Caſſius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honourable men.
I will not do them wrong: I rather chuſe
To wrong the dead, to wrong myſelf and you,
Than I will wrong ſuch honourable men.
But here's a parchment with the ſeal of Cæſar,
I found it in his cloſet, 'tis his will;
Let but the commons hear this teſtament,

Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,
And they would go and kiſs dead Cæſar's wounds,
And dip their napkins in his ſacred blood;
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their iſſue.

4 PLEBEIAN.

We'll hear the will; read it, Mark Antony.

ALL.

The will, the will. We will hear Cæſar's will.

ANTONY.

Have patience, gentle friends, I muſt not read it;
It is not meet you know how Cæſar lov'd you.
You are not wood, you are not ſtones, but men;
And, being men, hearing the will of Cæſar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad.
'Tis good you know not, that you were his heirs;
For if you ſhould, O what would come of it?

4 PLEBEIAN.

Read the will, we will hear it; Antony; &c.

ANTONY.

Will you be patient? will you ſtay a while?
I have o'erſhot myſelf, to tell you of it.
I fear I wrong the honourable men,
Whoſe daggers have ſtabb'd Cæſar. I do fear it.

4 PLEBEIAN.

They were traitors, &c.

ANTONY.

You will compel me then to read the will?
Then make a ring about the corps of Cæſar,
And let me ſhew you him that made the will.
Shall I deſcend? and will you give me leave?

ALL.

Come down.

3 PLEBEIAN.

You ſhall have leave.

ANTONY.

ANTONY.

If you have tears, prepare to ſhed them now.
You all do know this mantle; I remember
The firſt time ever Cæſar put it on,
'Twas on a ſummer's evening in his tent,
That day he overcame the Nervii.
Look! in this place ran Caſſius' dagger through;
See, what a rent the envious Caſca made;
Through this, the well-beloved Brutus ſtabb'd;
And as he pluck'd his curſed ſteel away,
Mark, how the blood of Cæſar follow'd it!
As ruſhing out of doors to be reſolv'd,
If Brutus ſo unkindly knock'd, or no:
For Brutus, as you know, was Cæſar's angel,
Judge, oh you gods! how dearly Cæſar lov'd him;
This was the moſt unkindeſt cut of all;
For when the noble Cæſar ſaw him ſtab,
Ingratitude, more ſtrong than traitor's arms,
Quite vanquiſh'd him; then burſt his mighty heart;
And, in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the baſe of Pompey's ſtatue,
Which all the while ran blood, great Cæſar fell.
O what a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then I, and you, and all of us fell down:
Whilſt bloody treaſon flouriſh'd over us.
O, now you weep! and, I perceive you feel
The dint of pity; theſe are gracious drops.
Kind ſouls! what, weep you when you but behold
Our Cæſar's veſture wounded? look you here!
Here is himſelf, marr'd, as you ſee by traitors.

1 PLEBEIAN.

O piteous ſpectacle!

ANTONY.

Good friends, ſweet friends, let me not ſtir you up
To ſuch a ſudden flood of mutiny:
They that have done this deed, are honourable.
What private griefs they have, alas! I know not,

That made them do it; they are wiſe and honourable;
And will, no doubt, with reaſons anſwer you.
I come not, friends, to ſteal away your hearts;
I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
That love my friend; and that they know full well,
That give me public leave to ſpeak of him;
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action nor utt'rance, nor the power of ſpeech,
To ſtir mens blood; I only ſpeak right on,
I tell you that which you yourſelves do know;
Shew you ſweet Cæſar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths!
And bid them ſpeak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your ſpirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Cæſar, that ſhould move
The ſtones of Rome to riſe and mutiny.

ALL.

We'll mutiny.———

ANTONY.

Why, friends, you go to do you know not what.
Wherein hath Cæſar thus deſerv'd your loves?
Alas! you know not. I muſt not tell you then.
You have forgot the will I told you of.

ALL.

Moſt true,—the will.—Let's ſtay, and hear the will.

ANTONY.

Here is the will, and under Cæſar's ſeal.
To ev'ry Roman citizen he gives,
To ev'ry ſev'ral man, ſev'nty-five drachma's.

2. PLEBEIAN.

Moſt noble Cæſar!

ANTONY.

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,
On that ſide Tiber; he hath left them you,

And

And to your heirs for ever; common pleaſures,
To walk abroad, and recreate yourſelves.
Here was a Cæſar!

Is there any oration extant in which the topics are more ſkilfully ſelected for the minds and temper of the perſons to whom it is ſpoken? does it not by the moſt gentle gradations arrive at the point to which it was directed? Antony firſt ſooths his audience by aſſuring them, that Cæſar loved the poor, and ſympathized with their diſtreſſes: by reminding them, that he had rejected the proffered crown, he removes from their ſhallow underſtandings all apprehenſion of that ambition in him which the conſpirators alledged as the motive of their act: after theſe managements he proceeds further, and tells them of the will. There is a delicate touch in the obſervation, that Cæſar received the mortal wound in the very mantle he wore the day in which he had gained a victory over the Nervii, the fierceſt of their Enemies. He excites tender pity by mentioning the ſtab given by his beloved Brutus. The remark that he fell as a victim at the feet of Pompey's ſtatue, whom the lower ſort conſidered as of a party unfavourable to them, is another happy ſtroke in this piece.

I am

I am ſorry that I muſt differ from the opinion of our commentator, who thinks the words, "O what a fall was there!" related to that circumſtance: it ſeems rather to refer to what immediately follows:

ANTONY.

Then I, and you, and all of us fell down:
Whilſt bloody treaſon flouriſh'd over us.

Meaning how the general ſtate of the republic was affected by the fall of ſo great a man. As the illiterate people are afraid of being impoſed upon by the arts of the learned and the eloquent, he very judiciouſly aſſures them he is no orator. The refinements of the French theatre, perhaps, would not endure the mob of plebeians that appear in this ſcene. The fickle humour of the people, and the influence of eloquence upon their minds, are truly exhibited; and I muſt own, as the imitation is ſo juſt, though the original may be called mean, I think it is not to be entirely condemned: one might perhaps wiſh the part of the mob had been ſhorter. The miſerable conceit of Cæſar's blood ruſhing out of the wound to aſk who ſo unkindly knocked, is indefenſible. The repetition of the words, honourable men, is perhaps too frequent.

The

The oration of Brutus, in many parts, is quaint and affected, an unhappy attempt, as the learned commentator obſerves, to imitate that brevity and ſimplicity of expreſſion, of which this noble Roman was a profeſſed admirer. Our author, who followed with great exactneſs every circumſtance mentioned in Plutarch, would probably have attempted to give to Antony the pomp of Aſiatic eloquence, if his good ſenſe had not informed him, that to be pathetic it is neceſſary to be ſimple.

The quarrel between Brutus and Caſſius does not by any means deſerve the ridicule thrown upon it by the French critic. The characters of the men are well ſuſtained; it is natural, it is intereſting; but it rather retards than brings forward the cataſtrophe, and is uſeful only in ſetting Brutus in a good light. A ſublime genius, in all its operations, ſacrifices little things to great, and parts to the whole. Modern criticiſm dwells on minute articles. The principal object of our poet was to intereſt the ſpectator for Brutus; to do this he was to ſhew that his temper was the furtheſt imaginable from any thing ferocious or ſanguinary, and by his behaviour to his wife, his friends, his ſervants, to demonſtrate,

ſtrate, that out of reſpect to public liberty, he made as difficult a conqueſt over his natural diſpoſition, as his great predeceſſor had done for the like cauſe over natural affection. Clemency and humanity add luſtre to the greateſt hero, but here theſe ſentiments determine the whole character of the man, and the colour of his deed. The victories of Alexander, Cæſar and Hannibal, whether their wars were juſt or unjuſt, muſt obtain for them the laurel wreath, which is the ambition of conquerors: but the act of Brutus in killing Cæſar, was of ſuch an ambiguous kind, as to receive its denomination from the motive by which it was ſuggeſted; it is that which muſt fix upon him the name of patriot or aſſaſſin. Our author, therefore ſhews great judgment in taking various opportunities to diſplay the ſoftneſs and gentleneſs of Brutus: the little circumſtance of his forbearing to awaken the ſervant who was playing to him on the lute, is very beautiful; for one cannot conceive, that he whoſe tender humanity reſpected the ſlumber of his boy Lucilius, would from malice or cruelty, have cut ſhort the important and illuſtrious courſe of Cæſar's life.

Shakeſpear

Shakeſpear ſeems to have aimed at giving an exact repreſentation on the ſtage, of all the events and characters comprehended in Plutarch's life of Marcus Brutus; and he has wonderfully executed his plan. One may perhaps wiſh, that a writer, poſſeſſed of all the magic of poetical powers, had not ſo ſcrupulouſly confined himſelf within the limits of true hiſtory. The regions of imagination, in which the poet is allowed an arbitrary ſway, ſeem his proper dominion. There he reigns like Pluto over ſhadows huge and terrible, of mighty and auguſt appearance, but yielding and unreſiſting. The terra firma of real life, and the open day-light of truth, forbid many pleaſing deluſions, and produce difficulties too ſtubborn to yield to his art. On this ſolid foundation however our author knew he could always eſtabliſh a ſtrong intereſt for his piece. Great knowledge of the human heart had informed him, how eaſy it is to excite a ſympathy with things believed real. He knew too, that curioſity is a ſtrong appetite, and that every incident connected with a great event, and every particularity belonging to a great character, engages the ſpectator. He wrote to pleaſe an untaught people, guided wholly by their feelings, and to thoſe

thoſe feelings he applied, and they are often touched by circumſtances that have not dignity and ſplendor enough to pleaſe the eye accuſtomed to the ſpecious miracles of oſtentatious art, and the nice ſelection of refined judgment. If we blame his making the tragic muſe too ſubſervient to the hiſtorical, we muſt at leaſt allow it to be much leſs hurtful to the effect of his repreſentation upon the paſſions, than the liberties taken by many poets to repreſent well-known characters and lights ſo abſolutely different from whatſoever univerſal fame, and the teſtimony of ages, had taught us to believe of them, that the mind reſiſts the new impreſſion attempted to be made upon it. Shakeſpear, perhaps not injudiciouſly, thought that it was more the buſineſs of the dramatic writer to excite ſympathy than admiration; and that to acquire an empire over the paſſions, it was well worth while to relinquiſh ſome pretenſions to excellencies of leſs efficiency on the ſtage.

As it was Shakeſpear's intention to make Brutus his hero, he has given a diſadvantageous repreſentation of Cæſar, and thrown an air of pride and inſolence into his behaviour, which is intended to create an apprehenſion

prehenſion in the ſpectator of his diſpoſition to tyrannize over his fellow-citizens. In this haughty ſtyle he anſwers the petition of Metellus Cimber, and the other conſpirators, for the repeal of Publius Cimber's baniſhment: the ſpeech ſuits the purpoſe of the poet, but is very blameable if compared with the hiſtorical character of the ſpeaker, which ought certainly to have been more attended to. It will divert the Engliſh reader to ſee what Mr. Voltaire aſſures us to be a faithful tranſlation of this ſpeech; and I will therefore give the original and tranſlation. When Metellus is going to fall at Cæſar's feet, he ſays to him,

CÆSAR.

I muſt prevent thee, Cimber.
Theſe crouchings and theſe lowly courteſies
Might fire the blood of ordinary men,
And turn pre-ordinance and firſt decree
Into the law of children. Be not fond,
To think that Cæſar bears ſuch rebel blood,
That will be thaw'd from the true quality
With that which melteth fools; I mean, ſweet words,
Low-crooked curtſies, and baſe ſpaniel-fawning.
Thy brother by decree is baniſhed;
If thou doſt bend, and pray, and fawn for him,
I ſpurn thee like a cur out of my way.
Know, Cæſar doth not wrong; nor without cauſe
Will he be ſatisfied

CÆSAR.

CÆSAR.

Cimber, je t'avertis que ces proſternemens,
Ces génuflexions, ces baſſes flateries,
Peuvent ſur un cœur faible avoir quelque pouvoir,
Et changer quelquefois l'ordre éternel des choſes
Dans l'eſprit des enfans ; ne t'imagine pas
Que le ſang de Céſar puiſſe ſe fondre ainſi.
Les priéres, les cris, les vaines ſimagrées,
Les airs d'un chien couchant peuvent toucher un ſot ;
Mais le cœur de Cæſar réſiſte à ces baſſeſſes.
Par un juſte décret ton fiére eſt exilé.
Flate, prie à genoux, & léche moi les pieds ;
Va, je te roſſerai comme un chien ; loin d'ici.
Lorſque Cæſar fait tort, il a toujours raiſon.

Ben Johnſon, by a faulty tranſcript of this ſpeech, or the blunder of a player, had been led into the miſtake of charging Shakeſpear with the abſurdity of making Cæſar ſay, he never did wrong without juſt cauſe; and Mr. Voltaire has ſeized on this falſe accuſation.—It is perfectly apparent to any perſon who underſtands Engliſh, that Cæſar by preordinance and firſt decree, means that ordinance and firſt decree he had before paſt for Cimber's baniſhment. And he ſays, I will not be prevailed upon by theſe proſtrations and prayers of yours, to turn my decrees into ſuch momentary laws as children make. If there had been any doubt of his meaning, the latter part would have cleared it.

CÆSAR.

CÆSAR.

I was conſtant, Cimber ſhould be baniſh'd;
And conſtant do remain to keep him ſo.

It is ſurpriſing that ſome friend did not prevent the critic from falling into ſo ſtrange a blunder about changing the eternal order in the minds of children. Many of his countrymen underſtand our language very well, and could eaſily have explained to him the ſignification of the prepoſition into, and that to change into always ſignifies to convert from one thing to another. Sweet words, crooked curtſies, and baſe fawnings, he tranſlates, the airs of a ſetting dog. *Lecher les pieds* is not a proper tranſlation of to fawn. Fawning courtiers would be ſtrangely rendered by feet-licking courtiers: a fawning ſtyle, a fawning addreſs, are common expreſſions; but did any one ever think of a feet-licking ſtyle? a feet-licking addreſs? Nor is *Je te roſſerai* a juſter tranſlation of I will ſpurn thee: the firſt being a very low phraſe; and to ſpurn is in our language a very noble one, and not unfit for the higheſt poetry or eloquence; indeed is oftener ſo uſed than in ordinary diſcourſe,

Mr. Rowe in the Fair Penitent makes Horatio ſay to Lothario,

I hold

I hold thee baſe enough
To break through law, and *ſpurn at ſacred order.*

If Mr. Voltaire ſhould tranſlate theſe words, he would triumph much that one of our moſt elegant poets talked of drubbing ſacred order. The tranſlator ſeems not even to know the Engliſh alphabet; for in tranſlating Porcia's words,

PORCIA.
If it be no more,
Porcia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

He puts in a note upon Harlot, to aſſure us that the word in the original is W———; which if he underſtood our blank verſe, he would know could not make up the metre.

Mr. Voltaire formerly underſtood the Engliſh language tolerably well. His tranſlation of part of Antony's ſpeech to the people, in his own play of the death of Julius Cæſar, though far inferior to the original, is pretty good; and in his tragedy of Junius Brutus he has improved upon the Brutus of our old poet Lee: he has followed the Engliſh poet in making the daughter of Tarquin ſeduce the ſon of Junius Brutus into a ſcheme for the reſtoration of her father; but with great judgment has imitated only what was worthy of imitation; and by

by the ſtrength of his own genius has rendered his piece much more excellent than that of Mr. Lee.

It muſt be allowed that Mr. Voltaire, in his tranſlation of Shakeſpear, has nobly emulated thoſe interpreters of Homer, who, Mr. Pope tells us, miſunderſtand the text, and then triumph in the aukwardneſs of their own tranſlations. To ſhew he decides with the ſame judgment and candour with which he tranſlates, it will be neceſſary to preſent the ſentence he has pronounced upon the genius of our great poet. Speaking of Corneille he ſays, he was unequal like Shakeſpear, and like him full of genius; *mais le genie de Corneille etait à celui de Shakeſpear, ce qu'un ſeigneur eſt à l'egard d'un homme du peuple né avec le même eſprit que lui.* I have given his own words becauſe they do not carry any determinate ſenſe. I conjecture they may be thus tranſlated; The genius of Corneille is to that of Shakeſpear, what a man of great rank is to one of the lower ſort born with the ſame talents of mind. When we ſpeak of genius we always mean that which is original and inherent, not any thing produced or derived from what is external.

external. But Mr. Voltaire by ſaying the genius of Corneille has that ſuperiority over our countryman, which a perſon of rank has over a man in a low ſtation, born with the ſame talents, perplexes the thing very much. It ſeems to carry the compariſon from the genius to the manner of the writers.

If that manner is preferable, which gives the moſt becoming ſentiments and the nobleſt character to the principal perſon of his drama, there is no doubt but our poet has perfectly eſtabliſhed his ſuperiority over his competitor; for it cannot be denied, that Cinna is *un homme du peuple*, (a low fellow,) compared to Brutus.

Mr. Voltaire, in all the compariſons he has made between theſe authors, has not taken into the account that Shakeſpear has written the beſt comedy in our language: that the ſame man ſhould have had ſuch variety of talents, as to have produced Macbeth and the Merry Wives of Windſor, is aſtoniſhing. Where is there an inſtance among the ancients or moderns of one poet's uniting the ſublime and pathetic, the boldeſt inventions of fiction, and

and the moſt juſt and accurate delineation of characters; and alſo poſſeſſing the *vis comica* in its higheſt perfection? The beſt French poets have been thoſe

Who from the ancients like the ancients writ;

and who have aſpired to the ſecondary praiſe of good imitators: but all our critics allow Shakeſpear to be an original. Mr. Pope confeſſes him to be more ſo than even Homer himſelf. It has been demonſtrated with great ingenuity and candour, that he was deſtitute of learning: the age was rude and void of taſte: but what had a ſtill more pernicious influence on his works, was, that the court and the univerſities, the ſtateſmen and ſcholars, affected a ſcientific jargon. An obſcurity of expreſſion was thought the veil of wiſdom and knowledge; and that miſt common to the eve and morn of literature, which in fact proves it is not at its high meridian, was affectedly thrown over the writings, and even the diſcourſe of the learned, who often preferred images diſtorted or magnified, to a ſimple expoſition of their thoughts. Shakeſpear is never more worthy of the true critic's cenſure, than in thoſe inſtances in which he complies with this falſe pomp of manner. It was pardonable

pardonable in a man of his rank, not to be more polite and delicate than his cotemporaries; but we cannot ſo eaſily excuſe ſuch ſuperiority of talents for ſtooping to any affectation.

I may perhaps be charged with partiality to my author, for not having indulged that malignant ſpirit of criticiſm which delights in expoſing every blemiſh. I have paſſed over beauties and defects in the ſame ſilence, where they have not eſſentially affected the great purpoſes of the drama. They are of ſo palpable a nature, the moſt inattentive reader muſt perceive them: the ſplendor of his fine paſſages is equally ſtriking. It appears to me, that the dramatic requires a different ſpecies of criticiſm from any other poetry. A drama is to be conſidered in the light of a living body; regularity of features, grace of limbs, ſmoothneſs and delicacy of complexion, cannot render it perfect, if it is not properly organized within, as well as beautiful in its external ſtructure. Many a character in a play, like a handſome perſon paralytic, is inert, feeble, and totally unfit for its duties and offices, ſo that its neceſ-

neceſſary exertions muſt be ſupplied by ſome ſubſtitute. The action is carried on much after the manner it is done in epic poetry, by the help of deſcription and narration, and a ſeries of detached parts.

It is unfair to judge ſingly of every line, in a work where the merit depends on the reſult of various operations, and repeated efforts to obtain a particular end. Works without genius are uſually regularly dull, and coldly correct, reſembling thoſe living characters that want, while

> They dream the blank of life along,
> Senſe to be right, and paſſion to be wrong *.

Some allowances muſt be made to thoſe who are more animated and more employed, if in the buſtle of great actions, and the exertion of great powers, they fall into ſome little errors. The genius of Shakeſpear is ſo extenſive and profound, I have reaſon to fear a greater number of excellencies have eſcaped my diſcernment, than I have ſuffered faults to paſs without my animadverſion: but I hope this weak attempt to vindicate our great dramatic poet,

* Dr. Young's Satires.

will excite ſome critic able to do him more ample juſtice. In that confidence I have left untouched many of his pieces, which deſerve the protection of more judicious zeal and ſkilful care.

FINIS.